

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

# All the Year Round

A Weekly Journal

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## "THE LAIRD O' COCKPEN."

By "RITA."

*Author of "Dame Durden," "Gretchen," "Darby and Joan," "Sheba," etc., etc.*

### BOOK II.

#### CHAPTER I. "IT'S WELL ENOUGH."

WHAT a long time it is since there have been any entries in my diary!

Sometimes I have thought I would give up the foolish habit altogether. There is no use in being confidential to paper and ink, and it is but a poor satisfaction to see the record of one's follies, and errors, and griefs staring one in the face after a lapse of time.

Yet habit is strong, and they say women must always have one to confide in. I have none, save this book, with its pages—some blank, some full—and certainly I can be more confidential to it than to any human being; so to-day I open it again, and make the first entry I have cared to make since my marriage.

My marriage!

Surely it was years and years ago that I stood in the little drawing-room at Craig Bank, and, surrounded by admiring relations and friends, put my hand into the hand of Donald Campbell, and heard the simple words that made us man and wife.

And now here we are amidst bright sunshine and blue seas, and the prospect on which I look is fair enough to delight any eye—poet's, or artist's, or ordinary mortal's.

The wind shakes the odour from the orange buds, the olive woods are silver-grey in the sunlight. It is a day early in February, but on this fair coast it might

be the height of springtime, so sunny and mild is the air, with the breath of narcissus, and primroses, and myrtles, and violets that blossom by millions under the sea-terraces, and in the woods of the villas.

The hotel windows look out on the blue Mediterranean—the sky is rose and gold in the west, where the sun is slowly sinking behind hills of amethyst and waves of silver. All along the curves of the bay the sea flashes and sparkles, as if glad of its own beauty—purple here, azure there—as the light catches its rippling surface.

Figures pass to and fro under the palms; the marbles of the Casino are white as snow in the lovely, glowing light; Monaco frowns darkly from the crest of its rocky hill; white sails of yachts and pleasure boats are drifting to Villefranche or San Remo. I look at it all, and think how beautiful it is after the grey skies, and chill mists, and cold, bleak snows of my Northern home.

But the beauty saddens me; why, I cannot explain.

As for the Laird—I still call him that—he has taken quite kindly to foreign travel and foreign ways. The little difficulties as to luggage, hotels, and money-exchange are made comprehensible by my thorough acquaintance with French and many Continental journeys, and my husband is perfectly content to pay so long as I can explain the why and wherefore of the payment required.

At the present moment he is at the Casino, studying the mysteries of roulette, and determining whether it is quite a proper place to take me to this evening as I have requested.

We have stayed a week at Nice, and now are paying wicked little Monte Carlo

a visit. I did not care to go out, and am lazily sitting here at the open window, contemplating the beauty of the scene, and, as I confessed before, making fresh entries in my long-neglected journal. What shall I confess to its pages as to happiness or unhappiness, sorrow or content? They are all blended in my memory as I look back on my few weeks of wedded life. Donald is very, very good to me, very kind, very thoughtful; but there is no use disguising the truth—we are utterly, utterly unsuited to one another. He has not a particle of poetry or romance in his whole nature. He cannot understand why I should rhapsodise over a scene, or cry and laugh at a theatre if moved to do so by some subtle and perfect piece of acting, or tremble and grow pale at some strain of grand church music that seems to lift my soul heavenwards independent of ceremonies or ritual. No, feelings and emotions such as these seem a riddle to him, and he looks at me wonderingly, as if I were some strange specimen of humanity such as had never come under his ken before.

I suppose if it were not for the constant travelling, and the novelty and excitement of sight-seeing, and the—to me—never-failing interest of hotel life, we should have been heartily sick of each other's society by this time. You see I am honest to my diary, and have to confess the truth to it.

But even with sight-seeing, and driving, and railway journeys, and the amusement to be derived from watching one's fellow-mortals at hotels, and observing inular prejudices, and the airs and graces displayed to the obsequious and not too honest foreigner—who pockets insults and gains with equal magnanimity—even with all this I cannot but agree that honeymoons are a mistake.

Perhaps if one were very much in love—Heigho! What is the use of talking nonsense? There is a young couple in the gardens below, pacing up and down among the palms, and tropical plants, and strange exotics, whom we have come across from time to time. They are honeymooning also, but are in a state of idiotic, engrossed infatuation that is distressing to a well-regulated mind.

I have watched them occasionally with a sort of wondering interest; they never seem to weary of one another—never care apparently for other company. Even at table d'hôte I have seen her hand slip into

his—a chance look of love unutterable flash from their meeting eyes—or caught some tender phrase whispered under cover of the general conversation.

Sometimes I have felt envious of her. She seems so perfectly, entrancedly happy—and he—he is young, handsome, debonair, an ideal bridegroom, and apparently an amusing companion, to judge from the ripples of laughter I hear, and the perpetual jokes that they have in common. The Laird seldom laughs, and if I ever venture upon a mild jest, or draw his attention to anything that strikes me as ridiculous, he seems to weigh the matter long and seriously in his mind before relaxing even into a smile at it. This is not encouraging, so I have devoted myself to drawing him out on the subject of his native land, and find he can get almost eloquent on that subject; but alas! on that only.

I suppose the sentiment of clanship is very strong among Scotch folk, Highlanders especially, and it exists up to the present time, despite the disbanding of clans after Culloden—a history that has been poured into my somewhat inattentive ears very frequently.

The Laird is not one of the roving class of landlords. He, and his fathers before him, have rarely left their native moors—even for other places and towns in their own country. As I have already said this is Donald's first experience of foreign lands, and perhaps that accounts for his reticence and want of enthusiasm. A depreciatory shake of the head, a sort of "Well, it's no that bad," is about all I can win from him in the way of praise or admiration.

It is somewhat disheartening, I confess. I have never seen him excited or amused. To everything and everybody he displays that unruffled calm—that watchful observance—that unfailing good-temper which is at once so characteristic and so trying in his people.

Nothing disturbs his equanimity—but nothing seems deserving of praise. Even as to climate—when I venture to remark on the delight of sunshine, blue sky, or settled weather, he is up in arms to defend his mists and rains, and bleak, cold days of wind and storm.

"Three hours of sunshine in the Highlands is worth three weeks of this calm, monotonous glare," he would say; "there is no light and shade, no sudden change of colour, no contrast of gloom and glory like

our skies and mountains there." And I could but shrug my shoulders and try to "command my soul in patience," and wonder why people were so obstinate in their prejudices.

"Wait till I show you a Highland sunset," he would say. Nor could I ever get him to allow that anything in the way of scenery we had yet seen was worthy of comparison with the lochs and hills of his native land, or that these calm seas deserved to be mentioned in the same breath with the long, rolling surges that thundered along the Cromarty shores, or swept up in stormy waves to Nairn, and Lindhorn, and Buryhead.

When a person—especially a Scotch person—is obstinately prejudiced in favour of his own particular land, it is hopeless to try and make him change his opinion. I gave in—at first protestingly, then resignedly, as behoved a wedded wife; and I have ceased now to try and rouse any enthusiasm in the heart of my lord and master on any subject whatever.

Perhaps these facts account for my sudden fit of confidence to my journal.

The sense of utter unsuitability to each other oppresses me more and more. It is not only the gulf of years that lies between us, but the impossibility to think, talk, feel alike on any given subject.

I feel that I am fast lapsing into depression and unsociability, withdrawing more and more into myself, and every day I assure that self that honeymoons are a great and grievous mistake, and wonder whether, after all, it would not have been better to remain in the land that has the honour of owning Corriemoor as one of its possessions.

At least I could have curtailed the length of that period of boredom, or could have had Bella to stay with me according to promise.

Now I have absolutely no one to speak to or confide in. How can I expect staid, matter-of-fact Donald to understand the vague whims and fancies, the caprices and exactions, the moods and vagaries of young womanhood?

They are all new and strange to him, and he has no key to unlock their mysteries. He constantly dilates on the perfections of his mother, who seems, from his description, to possess every feminine virtue under the sun; but he appears to know very little about women, and has evidently taken her as a model for the rest of her sex.

If they are not like her, they ought to be.

I know I am very, very different. I begin to think that he is also on the way to find that out, and that soon, very soon, he will be telling himself that he has made a mistake, and that the knowledge of that mistake will shadow all the future of his honest, useful, blameless life.

"Well, I suppose we are not the only people who have done that," I say to myself, somewhat bitterly, as I turn away from the sight of that pair of wedded lovers in the gardens below.

But the reflection is none the more consolatory because of its truth.

With it, however, I close this page of my journal, and proceed to look out a suitable gown for table d'hôte at seven o'clock.

It was a strange sight that met my eyes last night when the Laird and I left the brilliant rooms of the Grand Hotel de Paris and walked across the lovely gardens to the Casino.

With the blundering obstinacy of manhood he had, as I said before, gone over to the rooms in the afternoon to decide whether I might with safety be brought thither in the evening.

The difference in the scene must have been startling, or so I imagined from his look of amazement, and from my own later experience.

The Salle de jeu at four p.m. and at nine p.m. is a very different place. What a contrast between the scene without—lit by the imperial splendour of moon and stars—and the garish brilliance of the rooms, with their gaudy decorations and gilding, their moving, restless crowds, the incessant hum of voices in all languages, the chink of gold and silver, the monotonous cry of the croupiers, the idle, foolish laughter of women in airy toilettes and marvellous diamonds, as they pace to and fro with their no less foolish admirers.

A concert was going on in the room set apart for that purpose; but the audience was very scanty. The attractions of the tables certainly outweighed those of the diviner art.

I looked with keen interest at the scene. For me it had all the charm of novelty, all the wonder of the unknown. How absorbed some of the faces, how reckless and anxious others! What histories must have lain hidden under the paint and powder, the beauty and vileness, the despair and

effrontery, the nobility and baseness which that crowd of physiognomy presented !

" I want to watch the roulette players," I said to the Laird, as we made our way through the brilliant, restless throng.

He glanced uneasily about him as if fearful of encountering some compatriot or acquaintance, who would be shocked and amazed at such a proceeding.

" Indeed, I'm thinking it's not a right place for a lady to be in," he said, hesitatingly. " It's noways the same as when I saw it this afternoon. The crowd is just fearful, and certainly most of them look—well, I could not call it—respectable."

I laughed ; I could not help it. He looked so distressed and so perplexed. To me the types and faces were not so very different from those I had seen in the parks and hotels of Paris and Brussels, or at the races of Longchamps and Baden ; but I suppose there was something very shocking and very immoral about both place and people to my staid and virtuous Donald.

However, I had my way, and we struggled through a mass of skirts and elbows to a vantage-point at one of the tables.

There they sat in steady, immoveable array, the army of players, white, calm, desperate. All of life and feeling they possessed seemed centred in their eyes. Those strange, glittering, furtive glances fixed on the colour, or the piles of gold and silver, had a horrible fascination for me. I watched them awed and wondering ; the people with systems—the reckless believer in chance—the devotee of a combination of numbers—the cautious calculator of colour.

There they sat—steadfast and engrossed, oblivious to all else but that fatal pastime.

Wizened old women side by side with young girls—men, old, middle-aged, youthful, rich and reckless, or poor and calculating. There seemed contagion in the atmosphere. Suppressed excitement, mirth, triumph, expectation, hope, despair—so ran the gamut of humanity's best and worst emotions.

I stood there protected by Donald's stalwart form from the pressure of the crowd, and following with vivid interest the chances of the game, and the varying luck of the players.

I suppose he did not find so much interest in it as I did, for he soon began to show signs of impatience.

" Come away, Athole," he entreated at last. " This is no fit place for you. To me it looks just as fearful as hell itself might do."

I turned aside then and followed him through the rooms again, and we left the noise, and heat, and glare behind us, and went on through the dusky gardens to the beautiful terrace beyond.

The strains of a band floated from the distance ; the purple mountains looked down upon us ; the moon gleamed like silver in the deep, intense blue above ; the sighs of the restless sea came up from the curving shores below.

Involuntarily I slipped my hand into Donald's arm, and drew a long, deep breath of mingled pain and pleasure.

" Oh, is it not lovely ? " I cried, as I stood there on the marble terrace, and drank in with rapture the delights of sense and sight.

" It's no' as fair as Loch Fyne," was his reply ; " but it's well enough."

## CHAPTER II.

### THE WANING OF THE HONEYMOON.

" It's well enough ! "

That is about the height the Laird's admiration ever reaches. Whether he thinks it a point of honour to uphold the beauties of his native land as superior to all else he may behold, or is really incapable of admiring anything but his Highland lochs and hills, I cannot say ; but he certainly will not allow that anything he sees, or over which I rhapsodise, is one whit more beautiful.

It is rather exasperating sometimes. I hate narrow-minded people, and I have come to the conclusion that Donald is obstinate in his prejudices, and wilfully one-sided in his opinions.

As I am neither familiar enough with him nor fond enough of him to argue or coax him into accepting my views, I generally lapse into silence, and leave him to the serene content which his own seem to afford.

There is no use in making daily entries in my journal ; there seems so little to say. We dine, drive, walk, sleep, and, I suppose, mutually bore one another. At least, I can answer for myself. I am sure I know every landmark of the Corniche Road, every villa between Villefranche and Eza, every curve of the bay, every aspect of blue sky, blue water, and grey olive woods. I think the warm, sunny air, the breezes laden with the scents of orange and rose boughs, make me languid and melancholy. I begin to wonder how

much longer Donald intends to stay here, and to ask myself whether my own home could be duller or more depressing.

For the Laird is strangely unsocial. He rather avoids the society of his fellow-man. He seems to have a rooted prejudice against all foreigners, and to consider the men fools, and the women improper.

Now and then we go to the concert-room at the Casino, but once the music is over I am hustled away, and not allowed a glimpse at the Salle de jeu, or its glittering crowd of fashion and notoriety.

We visit Roquebrun, and Eza, and Mentone, spend a day at San Remo, and another at Antibes; but I am bound to say I find them all very much alike—with the exception of Roquebrun, and that certainly is ancient enough and picturesque and dirty enough to delight any antiquarian or artist.

The Laird, however, is always grumbling about "drains," and the general unwholesomeness of foreign towns; and he sees no beauty in the dusky roads, and the old, dark houses, and the quaint streets, where the old peasant women sit at their fruit stalls, and the flower-girls offer their roses and violets at every corner, and the little brown children tumble over one another's heads, and watch with big, shy eyes the strangers who stroll along.

So the days glide into weeks, and we have seen everything, and done everything, and I at last venture to suggest that we may as well turn our steps homeward. The Laird agrees readily, and almost rapturously. I suppose he is not sorry that his honeymoon is over.

I spend my last evening in wandering through the gardens, thinking to myself—I dare not confess it to my lord and master—that never again shall I probably see so lovely a sight as those dusky, starlit glades, with their subtle, exotic scents, and softly gleaming lamps, and the dark violet of sea and sky which forms their setting.

I think, in my heart, I am almost sorry to be leaving this place. Before me lies a life wholly new and strange—new scenes, new faces, new duties. A sort of dread seizes me as I think of all it may mean. Why was I in such a hurry to marry? Why did I not remain as I was?

Already I can see that between my husband and myself yawns a great gulf of dissimilarity; that we have no single taste, or habit, or desire in common. And I am so young, and I suppose, in all likelihood,

I have many years of life to look forward to; and yet—well, I only know that it seems to me that the mainspring of such life is for ever broken; that it will drag on, limp on with a dreary, if safe, monotony until we part company for ever on this material plane.

An epitaph which I have read somewhere will keep running in my head. It seems ridiculous and out of keeping with this beautiful scene, and the gay, chattering idlers scattered about; but, all the same, I find myself repeating it. It had been inscribed on the grave of one Thomas Price, aged twenty-seven; his wife, Mary, aged twenty-five; and his daughter, Mary, aged two years:

Our tyme on earth it were full short,  
The will of God was so;  
Affliction sore did faius on us,  
So we where forstt to go.

Over and over again the quaint rhymes ring in my ears—here, where the sea is sighing against the white marbles of the terrace, and the far-off strains of music float in sudden fitful melody from the distant rooms.

Our tyme on earth it were full short.  
I suppose it was a short life, if they were happy; and yet, perhaps, father, and mother, and child were better off than if one of the family had lingered behind to battle with the thorns and briars of this work-a-day world.

At least they were together so far as we know.

The will of God was so.

I wonder who put up the inscription! Surely not Thomas or Mary, for they could not have known they were to follow each other so quickly, and that the child would hasten after them to the "Unknown Land" with such willing feet.

Then I thought of the beautiful cemetery near my Highland home, with its Gaelic name and its quaint situation, and of my false lover's wooing, and the joy which had been so brief.

I think to-night I wish myself at rest under the shade of the rowans and fir-trees—to-night, when all the beauty and brightness of the life around me seem covered with the funeral pall of my own sad thoughts and sorrowful forebodings.

Sighing, I turn away, and retrace my steps to the hotel. I have said my farewells to garden and terrace—to Monaco on its dark, isolated rock, and Condamine,

with its pretty harbour, and the far, wide stretch of lemon, and orange, and olive woods.

"I suppose I shall never come here again," I say to myself, and perhaps the home of the dead and gone Grimaldi gains a new and regretful interest to me from the hour I leave it.

For in due course of time we do leave it, and set our faces homewards and Scotland-wards; and so for many days of wearisome travel, and depressing weather, and general fatigue and discomfort, I do not open my journal, or commit to its silent pages any information respecting my life, or thoughts, or surroundings.

In the North again.

How cold, and bleak, and dreary it looked to me after the blue skies, and sunshine, and green woods I had left! How I shivered in my warm furs as I sat in the railway carriage and looked out at the grey, bleak chain of the Grampians, and saw the whirling snow drifting past the windows, and the grey clouds piled in heavy masses in the grey sky overhead!

The Laird was stretched full length on the seat opposite, wrapped in a thick rug, and smoking a huge pipe. He looked comfortable and serene—facts probably due to the sensation that his foot was once more on his "native heath." I had faintly hinted that we might break our journey at Inverness—I so longed to see Grannie's sweet old face, and to hear Bella's cheery voice—but Donald did not respond to the suggestion.

"It is quite time," he said, "that you make my mother's acquaintance, and it will not look just respectful—under the circumstances—if we tarry here with other folk instead of going to Corriemoor direct."

I therefore said no more, and put the best face I could on the discomforts and fatigues I had to endure.

The train rocked and shook along the rough, uneven line until every bone in my body ached, and my brain felt absolutely stunned.

To read was impossible, and I never could keep up a long conversation with the Laird under the most favourable circumstances. To talk through the din, and rattle, and jolting of that fearful Highland railway was therefore a matter of more than ordinary difficulty. I could only sit there in dumb discomfort, and watch the snow falling over the dismal landscape,

and wish, in a weak and vain manner, that I had stayed in the Riviera for another month.

But the longest day comes to an end, and so does the longest journey, and at length the welcome mandate went forth to leave the train, as we were at the station nearest our destination. Then followed a long, cold drive in an open dog-cart; and at last, in the dusk and gloom of the dying day, I caught sight of my new home.

Miles and miles of moorland stretched around, white now with the snow-fall. The air was raw and bleak; the gaunt trees looked doubly gaunt, with their bare branches stretched skywards, and laden with snow. I was thankful to take my frozen limbs and chilled, small person into an atmosphere of warmth and light once more.

The hall was illuminated by a blazing fire and the light of many candles. On the walls were deer-antlers, and other trophies of the chase; and skins and rugs covered the oaken floor. I caught sight of pictures of the Laird's family and clan—evidently dating generations back—in kilt and armour, and other strange garbs, and all looking more or less stern and forbidding in their dark frames. My mother-in-law was standing beside the great open fireplace, awaiting us—a solemn, stately old dame, in rich and rustling black satin, and antique lace. Her white hair was plainly banded on either side her brow; her face was wonderfully fresh-coloured and unwrinkled, considering her age; the blue eyes were keen, and somewhat stern, but their expression softened as they rested on the tired and drooping figure which the Laird led up to her for welcome.

"My wife, mother," he said, simply; and something in the pride and tenderness of his tone touched me deeply. I felt the tears rush to my eyes, and I trembled from head to foot.

The stately old lady took me in her arms and kissed me warmly.

"Welcome, my daughter," she said, in that sweet, low, drawling voice which is so peculiarly Scotch, and as characteristic, to my thinking, as the accent itself. "I'm sure you're weary after so long a journey. I'll just take ye to your ain room, and ye shall haes a sleep and rest before dinner. We can bide an hour for that; eh, Donald?"

"Certainly," said her son, heartily.

"Only I'll just have a dram to keep out the cold, while you take Athole upstairs. Could you not give her some hot tea for herself, mother? She's almost frozen, poor bairn."

"It is all ready for her," said the old lady; and I was whisked off, and taken into a large, comfortably furnished bedroom, where a big fire blazed cheerily, before which a great, old-fashioned couch was drawn up.

My mother-in-law herself assisted me to remove my hat and wraps, and a neat Scotch maid unpacked my trunk and gave me one of my dressing-gowns; and I then was ordered to lie down on the big couch, and covered up with an eider-down quilt, and tea was brought in by the maid, Flora, and a delicious sense of rest, and comfort, and warmth stole over my tired frame.

I grew very drowsy, and the old lady noticed it and left me to sleep till dinner-time. The Laird came to waken me, but I was so spent and exhausted that he refused to let me come downstairs, so I had dinner sent to me there, and after dinner went to bed and slept—the deep, dreamless sleep of sheer bodily fatigue—until the maid knocked at my door next morning.

I have made a tour of the house, and been introduced to the old servants, and now am sitting in my own room, posting up my journal.

The snow is still falling heavily; the look-out from the windows is desolate in the extreme; but I feel rested and soothed, and fairly content. Every one has been very kind to me—the Laird, too, is far more genial and cheery in his own house than ever I have known him out of it.

I like this quaint, old house, with its rambling passages, and dark, old-fashioned rooms, and great fire-places. The old lady is never weary of relating anecdotes and histories of their people—of whose deeds of valour and virtue there seems to be an endless catalogue.

The Laird's own room—study as they call it—is mainly conspicuous for an absence of anything conducive to, or associated with, that word. It is hung round with trophies of the chase—guns, fishing-rods, golf-sticks, curling-stones, stuffed birds in cases, and great eagles and falcons perched on stands and brackets. I have never seen such a room, and he is very proud indeed of it.

My own bedroom is very large, with a deep bay-window at one end commanding a view of moor and hill and deer-forest. Part of it is furnished like a sitting-room, with writing-table, chairs, couch, work-stand, and very comfortable and pleasant it looks in the ruddy warmth of the fire-light, despite the grey sky and heavy snow-clouds without.

On the whole I feel very well content—though I doubt not the life here will be monotonous enough.

My mother-in-law has somewhat formally proffered me the duties of house-keeping should I wish to undertake them, but I plead inexperience and ignorance, and beg her to continue as she has always done—I am quite content to be second in the household. I can see the old lady is pleased at this, and so no doubt are the servants.

So begins my married life in my Scotch home. Romance is a folded leaf in a book which must never again be opened. I look on these pages, having made up my mind to lock them away, and forget—if possible—the dreams, and the follies, and regrets that they record.

One sigh for the youth that was so brief, the love that was so false, the hopes that were so futile.

One sigh—oh, Douglas—Douglas!

A tear follows the sigh—it rests on his name—the name that has cost me so many tears.

Will this be the last I shall shed for him? Heaven grant it. Good-bye, Douglas—good-bye, youth—good-bye, love.

## THE FORTUNES OF WAR.

### A COMPLETE STORY.

"MOTHER, do you think the Yankees can have killed Santa Claus?"

It was a golden-haired, rosy little fellow who asked the question, and there was a tremulous eagerness in his voice as he spoke, which showed it was for him no idle one.

"Mother, please do listen. Do you think the Yankees can have killed Santa Claus?"

"Killed Santa Claus! What do you mean, dear?"

"Why, he never came this morning, and it's Christmas Day, you know." A suspicion of a sob for a moment choked the child's utterance. "It's Christmas Day, and, if he were alive, I'm sure he

would have come. He never forgets, and my stockings were all ready. They must have killed him, as they killed Bernard."

He burst into tears.

The lady caught him in her arms in a passion of remorseful tenderness.

"My poor little darling, is it really Christmas Day? I had quite forgotten it. I am so sorry. Don't cry, Birdie. Santa Claus is not dead; he will come to-morrow. It is slow work travelling in this weather, you know; he has to take such a number of wraps with him."

As she spoke she looked down into the child's face with a smile, more touching in its utter piteousness than any weeping could have been.

"I am so glad he's not dead. I thought the Yankees would not have the heart to kill him, for some of them must have little boys and girls of their own, you see. Mother," he added, after a pause, "it's not a bit like Christmas. Dinah says there's no plum-pudding. Oh, here's Ina. Ina, Santa Claus is coming to-morrow; ain't you glad?"

A tall, handsome girl had entered the room. She looked anxiously at her mother.

"Birdie has not been tiring you, darling, has he?" she asked, with a world of tenderness in her voice.

"No, dear; he's very good. But I am so sorry I quite forgot it was Christmas Day." She glanced, as she spoke, at the very meagre supper that was spread on the table.

Ina laughed.

"Mammy has not forgotten it though, trust her for that."

"Mammy! Why, she is ten miles away, child."

"Is she?" Ina's bright young face sparkled with amusement. "My sweet, innocent mother, do you really think that the generalissimo and all his forces could keep Mammy away on Christmas Day? Mammy," she called out, raising her voice, "Mammy, mother says you are ten miles away."

A tall, black woman appeared at the door, literally beaming with delight. Birdie threw himself into her arms, with wild cries of "Mammy, Mammy;" and even Mrs. Sinclair's pale, sad face was for a moment lit up with a smile.

"Jes to tink dat Dinah ain't made no plum-pudden," Mammy exclaimed, as soon as the first excitement of her arrival had subsided. "Lors a massy! wat dese yer

niggers be a-comen' ter? De angels cum an' tolle me dia mornin' desselves she'd got dat idee. I din't believés 'em; sho, honey, I jes ups and sez to dem angels: 'Shucks,' sez I, "'lows Dinah to be a mighty no 'count gal; but she ain't gwine ter leave Marse Birdie wid no pudden for Christmar.'"

"But, Mammy, you cannot make bricks without straw," Mrs. Sinclair remarked, gently. "Dinah had nothing to make a pudding of."

"Sho! Nuttin to make a pudden out'er, when dey got all dat dar stuff up yonder?" the negress replied, pointing, with a sniff of scorn, to the place where the Northern soldiers were stationed. "Why, every little brat of a Yankee's got his pudden, and a fine one, too, I'll be bound, an' Marse Birdie wasn't to have none! Dinah's dat lazy she don't care nutten 'bout nobody. War yer'spose I got dese yer tings from?" she asked, triumphantly, pointing to a huge pile of provisions, which, with deft fingers, she was taking from her basket and arranging on the table. "Do yer tink dey fall out der sky? Why, bless yer heart, dey comes out de Gen'l's own cuburd, dey do."

"Oh, Delilah," began Mrs. Sinclair.

"Dey ain't no harm in it, nudder," the woman continued, stolidly, "'cos de Lor' Hissell, He tolle His folks to spile the 'Gyptians, He did. 'Taint us, nohow, dat's stealin', it's dem blessed Yankees, it is. Why, yer see dis yer turkey gobbler? w'y it was raised right on yer own pa's plantation, an' it's more yours nor hiss'n, nohow, an' I jes tolle that Gen'l so when I seed 'im. 'Delilah,' sez 'e, 'war yer gwine to?' 'Lor', massa,' sez I, 'I jes gwine to see Marse Birdie.' 'Marse Birdie,' sez 'e, 'an who gwine cook dat supper fur tonight, if yer goes trapain' roun' like dat?' 'Bless yer soul, massa, yer needn't get mad 'bout dat der supper. Dat supper's all right, but I'se bound to go an' see Marse Birdie on Christmas, I is sho.' Den 'e jest burst out, he did, Miss Clara, an' e got hol' o' de biggest swearin' words, an' e jes stamped, an' e jes cuss'd like ole blazes. I jes look at him jes quiet like, an' I sez, 'Gen'l, mebbe yer don't have no Christmas war yer comes from; dem Yankees dey is a queer lot any way, and mebbe de Lor' Jesus didn't like to risk Hissell among yer when 'e war little, nohow. But I is gwine to see Marse Birdie dis blessed day, an' dat yer may swear to, if yer wants to swear. Humph! I ain't got nudden to

do wid dat; but lemme tell yer one ting, while I is 'bout it: de Lor' He's a-writin' down all dem big swears of yourn in dat big book 'e got up dar, I can tell yer; so yer jes better look out. I is gwine to see Marse Birdie,' sez I, sharp like; 'until I'se got dat off'n my mind I ain't a-gwine to cook no supper fur yer.' Sho! I reckon I look' mighty 'termined wen I sez dat, so he jes lemme pass. Dar war a sort o' under-officer wid 'im, an' Lor', how dat chile did laugh, honey! 'E jes laugh till 'e shook all over.'

"But, Delilah, you must see," Mrs. Sinclair again began.

"But, Miss Clar'," she whispered—to Delilah her former mistress was always "Miss Clar"—"yer mussen get mad 'bout dat pudden, chile. Yer mus' jes tink o' dem po' little chilluns, honey, and dat's de truf. Lor sakes! yer 'spose Lord A'mighty wants Marse Birdie to go widout'n his Christmus pudden jes cos dem Yankees took it into dere heads ter fight us? Shucks! Chile, der ain't no sense in dat."

By this time not only was the pudding on the table, but the blue flame was playing around it, and, as the children's merry peals of laughter rang through the room, Mrs. Sinclair pressed Delilah's hand gratefully.

"Well, Marse Birdie, an' what 'a' Santa Claus a-brought you?" asked Delilah.

"Oh, Mammy," cried the child, looking up into her face with eyes that showed how sure he was of her sympathy, "he never came. I waited and waited until I was just nearly dead, and he never came. Mother's sure he'll come to-morrow, though."

"Miss Clar'!"

No words could reproduce the reproachful indignation conveyed by these words.

"I am so sorry," Mrs. Sinclair said, in a deprecating tone; "but, you see, I forgot it was Christmas Day."

For all reply the negress took the boy in her arms, and rocked him to and fro, cooing over him, and uttering those strange, inarticulate sounds which come natural to blacks when their feelings are moved.

"Oh, Birdie, Birdie, Mammy, leastways, aint a-gwine ter forget her Birdie, dis side Jordan, nohow!" she moaned.

The clock struck seven. Delilah sprang up as if shot.

"Sebben o'clock! An' dat dar supper at nine. Lor', Lor'!"

"Mammy, Mammy, don't leave us!" cried the children.

She kissed them again and again, and, with a hasty word to Mrs. Sinclair, vanished.

It was a real Christmas supper, after all, for, in addition to the turkey, plum-pudding, and half-a-dozen other dishes, Mammy had brought the huge mince-pie, and the black cake, without which no Southern banquet is complete. Birdie soon forgot his troubles whilst regaling himself on these dainties, and laughed and talked with all the lightheartedness of childhood. Ina, too, was well-pleased to have a change from the meagre fare to which, for some months now, they had been condemned. As she ate, though, she watched her mother with anxious solicitude, for the old hopeless look—which it almost broke the girl's heart to see there—had come back into her face, and she left the food on her plate untouched.

"Mother, darling, why don't you eat? This mince-pie is so good; do let me give you some!"

Mrs. Sinclair shook her head. The girl came and knelt by her side.

"Is it because they"—pointing significantly in the direction of the Southerners' line—"have no Christmas supper?"

Her mother's face was convulsed with pain.

"Ina," she said, softly, "a young man—a boy—was picked up by a Yankee sentinel this morning, dead, starved to death. Oh, Heaven, how they must suffer!"

In an instant Ina was on her feet. The basket in which Delilah had brought the provisions was still there; in it she quickly placed all that remained on the table. Mrs. Sinclair watched her in silence; the sympathy between them was too perfect for words to be needed. Birdie had crept to the couch, and was lying there half-asleep.

"It will be easy to cross the line to-night, mother; the Yankees will be too busy eating their plum-puddings to keep a good watch." She gave a little laugh, that ended in a sob. "Our men cannot be more than a mile away."

Mrs. Sinclair nodded, and took the basket in her hand.

"Good-bye, darling," she said, kissing her daughter tenderly. "I shall soon be back."

"Mother!" there was real consternation in the girl's voice. "Mother, do you think I would let you carry that heavy basket? Why, you could not do it. Besides, didn't father tell me to take care of you, and how can I, if you are out there all alone? You must let me go, too."

"No, no, Ina; that would never do."

"You must let me go; you cannot go alone."

"If I cannot go alone, then we must give it up," said Mrs. Sinclair, sadly, looking into the girl's flushed, eager face.

"Mother! and our own soldiers dying of hunger! You don't really mean that? Just think, Cyril may be there. Think," here her voice sank into a solemn whisper, "Bernard would like us to go."

Mrs. Sinclair glanced at Birdie; he was fast asleep by this time. She bent over him for some minutes, and her lips moved as if in prayer. Then, throwing a long, dark cloak over Ina's white dress, and drawing a shawl around her own shoulders, she said, quietly:

"We will go together, dear; yes, Bernard would like us to go."

It was a dark night, and a keen, cold wind was blowing. They walked swiftly along, keeping when they could in the shade of the trees. Not that there was much danger of their attracting attention, for no one was abroad. The General's orders were too strict for people to venture out unnecessarily at night. Straight in front, at a distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile, was a long line of lights placed at regular intervals; these were the outposts of the Federal army, where sentinels were stationed—sentinels that the wayfarers must elude. One of the lights seemed to glow less brightly than the rest, and for this one they aimed. On they crept, hand in hand, always nearer. What if they were caught? Was it treason in Yankee eyes to take food to the starving—to Cyril—to the men whom Bernard had loved? Well, they were traitors then; what cared they for the name? Still, jail in the Southern States was an awful place in those days, and Mrs. Sinclair's heart almost failed her as they drew near to the glare of light through which they must pass. Only for a moment, though; then, with one bound they were across in the darkness beyond. The danger was past, it seemed. A convulsive sob of thankfulness shook the girl's frame; but a closer pressure of her daughter's hand was all that showed

what the mother had suffered. In safety, at last, they thought.

At that moment a hand was laid on the girl's shoulder, and a thick voice called out: "Who dar?"

Mrs. Sinclair reeled as if she would have fallen, for four negroes stood around them. Ina, however, sprang forward, and seizing the hand of one man, with a little cry of joy, drew him into the shade. She had recognised his voice, and, child though she was, knew he would deny her nothing.

"Pompey, don't you know me?" she began, in an eager whisper.

"Lor', Miss Ina!"

"Pompey, you must let us pass. Mr. Cyril is starving, and we are taking him food. Why, Pompey, I have not seen you since the day I bandaged up your arm. Don't you remember? I hope it is better. We must go now, though; we have no time to lose. Good-bye."

"But, missie."

"Pompey, you must let us pass." The girl's voice with each word became more impressive. "Do you wish Cyril to die like that boy who was found this morning? You used not to be so cruel."

"Lor', missie, I is jes tinking 'bout yer, I is, co' it's mighty risky over dar."

"Oh, if that's all, we don't care," replied the girl, cheerily. "You go back to your post now; and not a word, mind. Come, mother," and they were out of sight before Pompey and his companions had recovered from their astonishment.

A weary tramp still lay before the mother and daughter, but they cared little now for that, though the road was rough and stony, for every step was bringing them the nearer to their own brave soldiers, of whom they were so proud. There was almost a ring of triumph in Mrs. Sinclair's voice as she answered "Friends," when next they were challenged. In an instant half-a-dozen pale, haggard soldiers stood around. They were in rags; hunger was written plainly on more than one of their faces; yet, to the most inexperienced eye, they bore the unmistakeable impress of gentlemen. The stately courtesy with which the one who seemed to be the leader advanced to greet Mrs. Sinclair and her daughter, was of the true grand seigneur type.

"We have crossed the enemy's line to wish you Godspeed in the brave fight you are waging," said Mrs. Sinclair, in her clear, high-bred tone. "We have brought you some Christmas fare, too," she added,

with a smile, handing the basket to the soldier who stood nearest her. "Such things run short in war, we know. Nay, no thanks, please; it is for us to thank you. My son, Captain Cyril Sinclair, is stationed here, I think. Is he well?"

There was something terrible in the anxiety with which she asked this question.

"Captain Sinclair left for head-quarters this morning," was the reply. "He is well and doing good work."

"Thank Heaven! Good-bye." She turned to go. The chief bent down and kissed the hand she gave him. He wished to accompany her, but she motioned him to go back. "Not one step, please; you would only increase our danger. Good-bye."

She drew Ina's hand within her arm, and passed swiftly into the darkness.

In the camp of the Federates, hearts were beating high that night: the march to the sea was accomplished; and the soldiers, to the latest recruit, were thrilled with pride when Sherman's name was mentioned. A few more weeks and all would be over, they thought; the ghastly war, in which brother was fighting against brother, would be ended for ever, and they the victors. From all sides that day news had come in that their enemies were starving; in rags they had been for many a day.

"Those fellows can't hold out much longer; the best amongst us don't fight long on an empty stomach," remarked the Colonel, glancing with a satisfied air at the well-spread table before him, around which some half-dozen officers were seated.

"How they live at all beats me," said the doctor. "Harris declared a month ago that they had not had a square meal for ages. No supplies have reached them since then; yet, only yesterday, they fought as fiercely as ever. They were within an ace of having those cannons once."

There was a sound of voices, and a sergeant appeared at the door.

"Two prisoners brought in, sir; caught crossing the line."

"Well, put them in the jail. I will see them to-morrow," replied the Colonel.

The sergeant looked embarrassed.

"The cells are all full, sir; and there's a queer set just now in the quad. Them niggers, you know."

"What of that?" asked the Colonel, sharply.

"Why, sir, they are ladies, you see."

"It will teach them to keep the law another time. Put them in the jail." With a peremptory gesture he motioned the man to go.

"Colonel, let's have a look at them first, though," called out one of the younger officers. "Have them in here."

The rest joined in his request.

The Colonel looked dubious.

"What a pest women are," he exclaimed. Then, curiosity gaining the upper hand, he told the sergeant to bring in the prisoners. "No nonsense, now, you fellows," he began.

But the words died on his lips, for a tall, elegant-looking woman, whose face still bore traces of unusual loveliness, entered the room with the air of an empress. She stood for a moment at the door and glanced round the room. She knew it well; for what was now the head-quarters of the enemy had been her home in the far-back days of her early girlhood. Her own piano was standing there open, just as some Yankee had left it; and the very flowers she had tended with such care were on the table, lavishing their sweetness on the men who had killed Bernard. "Oh, Heaven," she moaned in her heart, "I cannot bear it! If I could only fight or only die!"

Instinctively the officers rose. These were not the sort of prisoners they had been prepared to receive. They glanced from one to the other of them in wondering admiration. Ina's cloak had fallen to the ground, and as she stood there the light of the lamp fell full upon her in her simple white gown, with its broad black sash, her golden hair streaming around her in wild disorder, her large blue eyes gleaming with excitement. Her heart was beating fiercely; but there was no sign of fear on her face. She would have died rather than have allowed her lips to tremble before those men.

There was a moment's pause, and then the Colonel, as if ashamed of his embarrassment, asked the sergeant sharply what was the evidence against the prisoners.

The sentinel on duty at number seven had found them near the line.

"Did you see them across the line?" the Colonel asked the sentinel.

"No; but they must have been there. When I caught sight of them they were coming from that direction."

"Summon the sentinels on the outer line."

Pompey, the black man to whom Ina had spoken, and his companions advanced into the room.

Mrs. Sinclair's heart sank—it was not for herself she cared; but there was Birdie. Who would take care of Birdie? And Ina! Would they dare to send a young girl into that den to pass her days shut up with the very scourings of the universe? Every flake of colour fled from her face at the thought. She glanced at the commanding officer—curt, brisk, and business-like, there was no mercy in his face. She looked at the negroes—they all wore that expression of beaming self-importance which seems to come natural to them at a crisis. She noted now, for the first time, that one of them was a man named Michael Angelo, who had been on her husband's plantation before the war, and had been again and again punished for dishonesty. "He will have his revenge now," she thought, bitterly. "That it should come to this!" She tried to catch his eye, but in vain. Proud woman as she was, she would gladly have knelt to that negro for Ina's sake.

The first sentinel to be questioned was a stranger.

"Did you see the prisoners across the line?"

The man rubbed his head meditatively. The officer repeated his question impatiently.

"Lor', massa, I was jes tryin' ter remember. Yesterday."

"To-night, of course, I mean, you block-head," exclaimed the Colonel, losing his temper at the unutterably stupid air the man wore.

"How yer s'pose I know dat?" the negro began in a plaintive tone; then, judging from the commander's expression that further parley would be fraught with danger, he added, hastily:

"I never seed nuttin', nohow."

The Colonel motioned him to stand aside.

"Did you see the prisoners?" he asked, turning to Michael Angelo.

"Did I see wot?"

"The prisoners?"

"Is yer talking about Miss Clar' an' Missie?"

"I mean these——"

The Colonel hesitated, and a flush of shame passed over the faces of some of his officers.

"I sees; it's de ladies," said the man, with a grin; whilst the other negroes

giggled. "I never seed no ladies, I tell yer."

"Could they have passed without your seeing them?" enquired the officer.

Michael Angelo drew himself up with an air of offended dignity. Throwing back his head, and placing his hand upon his breast in true oratorical style, he began:

"When yer put me dar at dat der pos', yer tole me not ter let nobody cross de line; yer likewise tole me ter defend de Republic from de en'mies; an' I done it ter de bes' o' my 'bility, yer bet. I jes fixed my eyes on dat blessed line, an' no human crittur ain't crossed 'er yit, you be bound."

"This is arrant tomfoolery!" called out the Colonel, angrily. "You must some of you have seen them."

Pompey stepped briskly to the fore.

"I seed 'em sho' nuf," he said. "Miss Ina, she had on a mighty nice white frock, an' wid her yaller hair a-flyin' all about, she looked mos' like a angel, she did. Yes, I seed 'em."

The Colonel gave a grunt of satisfaction, whilst unutterable scorn flashed from Ina's blue eyes.

"That's enough," said the former. Some one leaned over and whispered to him. "It's clear enough," he added, impatiently.

"I 'ad like to tell yer whar I seed 'em," Pompey remarked, gently.

"Well, only make haste. Not that it matters where; the order is not to cross the line."

"Dey was jes a-standin' by dat holly-bush, over dar; an' Miss Ina, she jes ups an' sez, sez she—wid her big eyes looking mighty bright an' pearl-like, 'Birdie shall have some holly. Dem Yankees dun took all his flowers'—dem's Miss Clar's flowers," pointing to those on the table—"but he shall have some holly.' Yer see dey'd jes come out ter pick some holly for dat blessed chile."

"Do you mean to say you crossed the line merely to gather holly?" asked the Colonel, for the first time addressing himself to Mrs. Sinclair.

"Certainly not," she replied, quietly.

"Cross de line," exclaimed Pompey, indignantly. "How yer run on, massa. Dey ain't put dey foots 'cross dis yere line dis day; dey ain't neber tempt seek a ting, I can tell ye. Dat holly-bush hisself, he's on dis side de line, ef I ain't mighty deceived. Bless yer heart, Cunnel, what

yer s'pose dey wants ter cross de line fur, anyhow ? Miss Clar', she couldn't walk ter de camp no mor'n a bird could fly wid his wings broke."

A gleam of pleasure shot across Mrs. Sinclair's face—the first that had visited it since the day the news came that her eldest-born was slain and her husband a prisoner. She was conscious of a thrill of triumph, too, such as she had not felt for years, as she thought that the Yankees, with all their bribes and blandishments, were powerless to shake the fidelity of the blacks. Perhaps the Colonel read something of what was passing in her mind, for the frown deepened on his brow. He, at least, was none too well pleased with the turn affairs had taken. There was a touch of almost personal spite in his voice as he warned her not again to quit her house after nightfall.

Mrs. Sinclair hardly heard what he was saying, she was so happy at the thought that she was free to go home to Birdie, and that Ina was safe. She smiled quite graciously on the commander as she turned to leave the room; but she stopped at the threshold, for there was the sound of a rush of feet in the corridor, and there were shrieks of distress, piercing as only blacks can utter them, mingled with cries of "Doctor, doctor." The door burst open, and a crowd of men and women, mostly blacks, rushed into the room.

They were pressing close around a great gaunt man in the uniform of the Northern army. He had a strange, dazed look in his eyes, as of one upon whom a terrible misfortune had fallen, and he held something white in his arms. The doctor sprang forward, and the soldier, with infinite tenderness, held his little burden towards him, gasping as he did so :

"I shot him. I thought it was a man creeping across the line, and I shot him."

It was a child, with blue eyes looking out from beneath a mass of golden curls.

At that moment a wild cry of "It's Marse Birdie, it's Marse Birdie," rang through the room, followed by a piteous little moan.

"Mother, mother, the Yankees have shot me." Already he was in her arms. "Mother, I was sure you had gone to meet Santa Claus, and I followed you to meet him too. The Yankees have shot him, you see; I'm sure of it now. How could they be so naughty ? Did he never go to Yankee children ? Oh—mother ! "

His little head sank back, a convulsive

tremor passed across his face, and all was over.

Ina sank down at her mother's feet, and buried her face in her lap, her whole frame convulsed with sobs. Mrs. Sinclair's was the one face in the room that bore no trace of grief. She stood there, calm and quiet, white as death, it is true, but with almost a smile on her lips, looking down at her boy.

The doctor attempted to take him from her arms, but a glance warned him to desist.

"Some brandy, quick," he called out, frightened by the strange, fixed look in her eyes. He held it to her lips, but she turned away her head; and, although he heard no sound, it seemed as if she said : "Yankee brandy."

At length she moved slowly towards the door, and as she did so her eyes fell upon the Northern soldier who had shot her child. He had sunk down on a chair; his hands were before his face; his huge frame was trembling with the intensity of his grief. She passed to his side, always holding her dead child closely pressed in her arms. She stood for a moment as if struggling to speak.

"Oh, missus, you don't reckon I'd a hurt the little chap on purpose, do you ?" the man cried, in a voice rendered strange and unnatural by his suffering. "I challenged twice, you may make sure o' that. I'd a' rather died than s' hurt a hair o' his head."

Again she tried to speak, but in vain. Then, with a pitying little smile, she looked down into the soldier's face, laid her hand on his, and fell to the ground.

When they raised her, the smile was still on her lips, the child was still clasped firmly in her arms; but she was dead.

#### ALTABISCAR.

FROM THE BASQUE.

On the broad Basque mountains arose a cry,  
Shrilly and wildly it rang to the sky.  
Etcheco Jauna stood calm at his door,  
"Who goes?" he shouted amid the roar.  
As his sheep dogs' baying was echoed far  
Over the heights of Altabiscar.

Through Ibeneta's winding cleft  
The clamour sounded from right to left.  
'Tis the noise of a host that comes from far !  
Our mountains give back the shout of war !  
Etcheco Jauna heard with a frown ;  
He took his bow and his quiver down.

They come, they come ! How the sunbeams dance  
On flutter of flag and flashing of lance ;  
Rank upon rank, like billows piled.  
"Count our foemen ; count well, my child."  
He numbered them slowly to full a score—  
"Twenty ! eye, twenty, and hundreds more ! "

Stay not to number them, on to the van,  
From the broad Basque mountains come every  
man!

Tear up the rocks 'mid the boulders grey,  
Thunder them down on the winding way,  
Thunder them down on each serried rank,  
Thunder them down upon either flank.

What would they here from the busy North?  
Why must they send their squadrons forth?  
God made our hills for our use alone;  
God gave our hills, and we guard our own.  
Crash down the rocks on the path they tread,  
Give the invaders a welcome dread.

Fly all who may from such blood-stained tomb;  
On the wind floats Carolean's raven plume;  
Still lies thy nephew, oh, great Roländ,  
With his dauntless heart and his terrible hand!  
Now, now, ye Basques! let your arrows fly,  
Thick as the hail 'neath the wintry sky.

For they fly, they fly! What now remains  
Of the banners that danced across the plains?  
Of the plumps of spear-heads that gleam no more,  
For their sheen is lost in the stains of gore?  
Count them, my child, for the day is done,  
Count them, backward, from twenty to one.  
What! are none left to number, my son?

Not one, not one, for the fight is o'er;  
Etcheco Jauna, stride home once more;  
Pass, with thy dog, where thy wife awaits  
With thy child in her arms beside thy gates;  
Cleanse horn and arrows, lie down in peace  
For a while the clamour of war will cease,  
For the vultures bark to the tainted breeze,  
And swoop to their feast in the Pyrenees.

### WINTER BY THE RIVER.

SOME consciousness of heroism must sustain the man who sallies forth on a cold, wintry morning—Sunday morning, too—when he might be warm and comfortable in his bed, like the rest of the world. It is not early as the clock goes, but as the sun goes it is very early morning—his majesty showing just over the chimney-pots in a frosty haze, his face looking pink and chilly, and with as much warmth about him as if he were a mock sun in a pantomime. Yet the ting-tang of a church-bell from some tower, invisible in the mist, suggests that some good souls are already stirring; and there is a newspaper boy somewhere ahead, with a sheaf of Sunday papers under his arm, whose careless way of piping out “Paper!” every now and then, shows that he has been ordered overnight, and that he has no mission to awaken his customers from their deep repose. Then some locomotive engine comes out, frothing, and hoarsely puffing, from its snug, warm shed, throwing forth curdled masses of white steam, and feeling the cold apparently as much as any of us.

As we pass away from the forest of roofs, the world grows whiter and whiter, and the snow, which in the town has only

remained in isolated patches, here forms the universal covering. How miserable look the cabbages in the fields, which would droop upon their stalks if cabbage stalks were of sufficiently delicate fibre, but which to-day are all curled and crisped by the frost in the saddest way imaginable; and the rows of suburban villas seem thoroughly frozen up, with dead plants, and withered flowers, and dishevelled bunches of creepers mingled in a general ruin.

We have crossed the river more than once, evidenced by a dark, misty void, in which float indistinct forms of black barges, of grey, ghost-like bridges, and of tufted woods, all terraced in snow wreaths. But now there is nothing to be seen but great wide fields, powdered with snow, and glittering in the chill sunbeams. And here is a tributary stream, which you might pass without knowing anything about in the summer-time, but which is now a quite respectable little river, full up to the brim, but frozen hard and fast. The noise of the train flushes some water-fowl, which fly skimming the cold, frozen stream; and it seems as wild and free as a country stream can be, slipping from copse to copse through its fringe of willow and alder. But in its normal condition it is the Kempton Park river, and its banks are haunted in the summer-time by the ragged fringes of the racing community—those tricksters and sharpers who lie in wait for the crowds that flock to the important races of the year. But there is nothing to be seen to-day of any racecourse; what the snow has not buried the wintry haze conceals. Yet at places haze and vapour are strange and capricious in their arrangements. Low banks of vapour rest upon the ground, and above them you see the tops of trees, of stacks, and of tall substantial houses, which all seem to be floating together in the air; or sometimes the arrangement is reversed, and things are seen rooted to the earth while their summits are lost in the clouds. With all this as the sun's rays—although they have no warmth for us—are beginning to make themselves felt upon contending columns of vapour and rarefied air, many curious distortions of familiar objects continually present themselves.

When the train reaches its destination, and its passengers—just three shivery individuals, with shoulders hunched up almost to their ears—are turned out upon the open country, with only a very thin

hedge to shelter them from the keen breath of the north wind, all kinds of signs and portents seem to mark their progress. The honest railway porter, who is coming on duty with his lamp and staff, looks almost as broad as he is long in the strange hazy light, and the rural postman on his round assumes the awful proportions of a giant—Cornish or otherwise. He really is a tall fellow that postman, and a sense of the unexpected may have added to his imaginary stature, for all the postmen we are acquainted with are small of stature; but anyhow, there was the effect, as of a giant of the old world, whose advancing stride might make the boldest tremble. But after these two, compelled to be abroad by public duty, there are no more human subjects for optical illusions.

As we leave behind us the rambling outskirts of a village, it is noticeable how still and silent are the cottages, without life or movement about them. Through the thin walls of latter-day cottages you may hear the sound of a hacking cough or of a soothing comfortable snore. Children fret and babies cry; but no sounds have power to waken honest Giles and Joan, who are making up for the long, fagging days of the week in a plethora of rest on Sunday. And beyond the radius of the village there is nothing but solitude. The fields stretch out on either hand, glittering in their snowy trappings, while every twig, and bush, and bramble is covered with a fairy tracery of hoar-frost. Where a group of elms meet in a sombre archway over the road, the contrast of their dark, shadowy forms with the silvery frost-work beneath is curious exceedingly.

Passing on in the stillness and silence, it is almost startling to come upon the river. It is across the next field, with only a thin hedge between—the river in its most unassuming aspect, with hardly any banks to speak of, but coursing swiftly along with smooth, unbroken surface of dark, dun-coloured waters, passing by without a ripple, without a murmur. The river comes into sight and disappears in a sharp curve, the rest of its course lost to sight in the great white plain, where everything is hazy and indistinct. But from this point there is no more of the perfect silence of the morning. All round about we now hear the frequent gun—bang! bang! from all points of the compass, and with every variety of intonation, from the roar of the long duck-gun to the feeble crack of the pea-rifle. Everybody who

owns any kind of firearm is out on the war-path this morning against the unhappy birds.

For this is a bad time for the birds, whom the sudden frost has deprived of food, and who have left their usual haunts to spread themselves over the river meadows, where there is the best chance of finding some kind of provender. Then there are our usual winter visitants, who have made an early appearance this year—snipe, for those who know where to find them; and wildfowl of all sorts fresh from the arctic regions, to whom this little bit of hard weather is the merest child's play. Across the fields, too, moves a melancholy procession of crows, whom nobody cares to shoot, and who are driven to their wits' end by semi-starvation. These will emulate the celebrated fasting-man in their fortitude, and will be little the worse for their abstinence. But it is otherwise with the larks, of whom numbers are scattered about the fields, lying close like stones, and taking low, short flights when disturbed. These poor songsters, with the delicate organisation of their race, give way under cold and privation, so that many die by the way, while hundreds are brought to bag by the demon gunners. They are demons, anyhow, these gunners, in respect of invisibility, for there is not one of them to be seen, although such a brisk fusillade all round is sounding in the frosty air.

When the object of this early morning pilgrimage is reached, there is rest and solace for a while, and when the ramble is resumed, other sounds are to be heard. There is the vague vibration of distant bells, which strike the ear from every point of the compass. Many a dozen parishes must contribute to this general hum of bells, which the thin, frosty air carries from wide distances. And now there are plenty of pedestrians about, who are not, perhaps, all of them directing their footsteps churchwards. But, here again, there is nothing to be seen of the sources of the all-pervading sounds. They may be like the sounds that are heard in the desert—where bells are said to ring from churches and convents which have long since disappeared from the surface of the earth.

Anyhow, no church tower, lofty or humble, meets the view, but instead a high stone bridge, with comely arches, through which the deep dark flood pours with a silent, treacly rush, while at the

hythe, or landing-place, cluster a number of craft sheeted up or bound in tarpaulin, a houseboat, a launch or two, and a score of boats and punts. Dark and chilly everything looks, with a few white roofs to look down on the wintry flood. The lock, a few short months ago, at such a time as this, crowded with pretty craft and overflowing with the gaiety of nations, is now of a coldness and blackness in its stern solitude, set in a framework of un-trodden rime. On the weir, looking down into the depths of the tumbling bay, sit a row of swans, their shoulders hunched up, and their necks, as far as circumstances allow, tucked into their snowy collarettes. And the tow-path stretches out on either hand, white with frozen snow, which man nor beast has disturbed since it fell.

And the tow-path, followed down the river, brings one to a pretty village scene of cottages grouped about a church with a grey old tower, and just below a pebbly margin, where the ferryman's punt is moored in a little backwater, beyond which the main river rushes by with a mighty sweep. The grey old tower was, no doubt, concerned in the general tintinnabulation which we heard just now; but it is silent enough now, and so, indeed, is the whole village. The only inhabitant who is in evidence as not being in church is the ferryman—and he, no doubt, is exempt from attendance in virtue of his calling. The villagers are getting their sermon now, no doubt, but not a sound of it is to be heard outside. The whole place is as still and deserted as if it were under the spell of a fairy godmother.

The spell is broken as the village is left behind, for the deep notes of an organ are heard, and fresh young voices welling forth from every pore of the little church, and presently the rustle of footsteps is heard, and the lane is marked by a dark procession of people who have been to church. And that is a sign that the train will soon be on its way that is to take us back to London town.

## THE TREVERTON MARRIAGE.

A SHORT SERIAL STORY.

### CHAPTER VI.

IF ever woman was promptly repaid for an act of Christian charity it must have been Mrs. Dudley. Not only had Sir Everard and his future wife placed themselves deeply

in her debt; not only could she revel in pictures of what Miss Treverton would say at finding herself dowered with a stepmother; not only did she feast on the prospective triumph of showing all her friends—and enemies—how she had been in such a great secret, and of being besieged for information as to how it had come about, and what Sir Everard had said and done, and what Beatrix was and was not, and how the love-making had gone, and how the wedding had been carried out; besides all this, she had virtually the buying of the trousseau. This was to be ordered from Paris, Sir Everard insisting that it should be his present to his bride. Beatrix had naturally demurred at such an arrangement, declaring that she had money enough in hand, and would rather go to her husband with a scanty wardrobe than come upon him for such expenses before the time; but Mrs. Dudley had abetted the bridegroom, and they together overruled her. The question next had come up, how was a trousseau fit for Lady Treverton to be bought in Monkchester without the whole neighbourhood finding out that a wedding was coming on? Then, how was a bride in the North of England to have her dresses properly fitted by dressmakers in Paris? Sir Everard had talked foolishly of ready-made dresses, which he knew could be procured to any extent in answer to a simple letter; but this idea was contemptuously laughed away; so the end of it was that Beatrix was sent to Paris with Mrs. Dudley, as Helena had been sent with Lady Carlaurie to London, after a week of happy love-making at the Vicarage, and under the shadow of the Roman wall—all the sweeter because of the sense of danger almost as terrible as what Roman and Scottish lovers had risked in the days of raid and romance.

But it was impossible to go on thus without discovery, impossible also to live under such a strain of uncertainty. Helena, still in London, kept writing so importunately to her father to join her there, and then to go to Carlaurie when she did, and at last even threatened to change her plans and come to Owaldburn after all, so that he felt he must run up to town to soothe, satisfy, and silence her. He began to look so worried and miserable that Beatrix could not bear to thwart his wishes and prolong his anxiety by deferring the marriage till their engagement should have lasted to something of a conventional length.

There was discussion after discussion, the result of which was, Beatrix consented to be married after a three-weeks' engagement. Sir Everard, in gratitude and delight, consented to deny himself the sweetness of her society for the next fortnight. Mrs. Dudley consented to charge herself with the care of bride and trousseau, and visit Paris for a fortnight at Sir Everard's expense.

So Sir Everard ran over to Paris alone, to engage rooms for them and arrange for the marriage. He took no one but his valet into his confidence regarding his destination, leaving only his London club address behind him. He stayed two days in Paris, having telegraphed to Helena on his arrival, that business had called him there, and that he would be with her in London in a few days. Paris was quite empty, and he had no time to spare, so she must not join him there. Then he telegraphed to Mrs. Dudley, after two days, that all was ready, and that he would meet her with Beatrix at King's Cross, and pilot them to Dover. Accordingly the two women left Oswaldburn, each in a dream—Beatrix hardly realising the wonderful joy that had come to her so quickly; Mrs. Dudley bewildered to find herself setting off for Paris with less preparation than she would have made for a week's visit to the county town. One new dress she had managed to get out of her Monkchester dressmaker, in spite of Beatrix's remonstrance that she would get such a much better one in Paris, and that to take a new gown there was not carrying even coals to Newcastle—but mere ashes and rubble. The Vicar himself had all this while been a mere cipher in their plans, and remained a cipher. He was a meek man, whose life was spent in his study, and who had no will or non-theological opinions, but used his wife's habitually, and saw everything in what light she chose to throw upon it. Marrying and giving in marriage were of much less moment to him than the least phase of ancient heresy. He knew nothing of objections that might be urged against this marriage, of Helena's anger, of Beatrix's want of position, of undue haste. He liked privacy himself, so it seemed only proper and natural that they all should like it, and thus readily promised a secrecy he should never have felt the least temptation to break. There were no children whose well-being might have required consideration during their mother's absence.

So all went well. They arrived safely

in Paris, which, in spite of its social emptiness, was a paradise to them both. Beatrix had never seen the lovely city, and Mrs. Dudley luxuriated in the power of money-spending. She acted as Sir Everard's treasurer. It was delightful beyond all words. She had never in her life had so much money at her command; she had never lived so luxuriously; she had never had such deference shown her as the hotel people and tradespeople showed to her as a wealthy English lady, coming as a very rain of gold to the desert of Paris out of season. Then the pleasant sense of power was not marred by the thought that Beatrix could look upon her as a mere companion or secretary; for Beatrix could not be so very proud, seeing Sir Everard was paying for her trousseau and hotel, and that Mrs. Dudley knew all about it.

Sir Everard in London did not have quite such a good time as his betrothed. First of all, his conscience troubled him greatly. He felt himself a traitor to his affectionate, unsuspecting daughter, who, fortunately, was too full of her own affairs to notice any troubled expression on her father's countenance, or any absence of mind while she discoursed of Chimborazo and diplomacy, and the chances in favour of long or short delays before she should join her "ambassador" in the far West. Then it was so difficult to tell her that he could not go with her to Scotland, to find reasons for opposing her. She was so very determined that he should go, so utterly incredulous of any obstacle worthy of opposing her wish. He found himself gradually growing angry with her. It was preposterous that she should imagine herself paramount in his life, that no one's wishes must clash with hers. How different from this was his tender, unselfish, but high-spirited Beatrix! What madness it would have been, had such a wild folly ever crossed his mind, to have sacrificed a life of bliss with Beatrix for the sake of slavery under Helena. For slavery it must have been; he saw it now, as he chafed and champed under the suspense and anxiety of those days. He began even to dislike Helena, to long to be out of sight of her angry eyes, her imperious manner, out of hearing of her haughty persistence that only her way should be his.

But it came to an end, though he had come to despair of any end to it—almost to believe that he would never be released from this durance vile to fly to his beloved,

and make her wholly his own, beyond the hindering of mortal mischief. Helena's frocks were finished, and empty London was hateful beyond endurance. Satisfied with a promise from her father that he would write from Paris, whither he must return at once, and then join her at Carlaurie if she still wished it, she departed, and Sir Everard, having seen her off at King's Cross, sped to Charing Cross on the wings of love and cab wheels. Next day he and Beatrix were married at the British Embassy.

Never did bridegroom look handsomer, more joyous, more hopeful; rarely did bridegroom even look younger, and yet he had sat up into the small hours writing an anxious letter. But he had had such refreshing sleep after posting it, his mind was released of such a burden of suspense, that he needed not to lie awake into the morning, thinking how it would be received. What matter how it was received? By the time it reached Helena the deed would be done that never could be undone—the knot tied that only death could sever. No one could harm them now. So he slept until he was awakened to the full sunshine of his marriage morning.

Of course, the wedding was the quietest of weddings. The bride wore her travelling-dress, and there were no witnesses but Mrs. Dudley and two attachés of the embassy, friends of Sir Everard's, one of whom obligingly officiated as the bride's father, the other as best man. Then Sir Everard and Lady Trevorton drove to the railway station, and so on to the Pyrenees; and Mrs. Dudley packed her own trunks—swollen considerably by the munificence of Sir Everard—and departed for England and Oswaldburn.

"It will be dull after dear Paris," she said. "But rest and peace will be delightful after all this excitement, and work, and running about."

But neither peace and rest nor dulness are for the wicked; and who can be wickeder than one who has conspired against the happiness of a deeply wrung daughter, against the dignity of a great family?

The wedding took place on a Tuesday. Mrs. Dudley arrived at the Vicarage on the Thursday night, tired, but important, panting breathlessly for the glory with which she would be covered on the morrow, when the whole neighbourhood would pour into her drawing-room to hear

all about the wedding. For was it not in all the English papers? And though it was only a simple notice in the marriage column—"On the 13th inst., at the Chapel of the British Embassy, Paris, Sir Everard Trevorton, Bart., of Oswaldburn Chase, Moorlandshire, to Beatrix Laura, only child of the late Cyril Lyon, Esquire, of Wellingby"—though her own name was not mentioned, did not everybody know she and Beatrix had gone to Paris together, and could not such a simple two and two be put together now?

So on Friday afternoon she took her place in her drawing-room—which was freshly adorned with flowers—and awaited her guests. She wore one of her new Paris dresses, and she had a piece of Paris fancy-work in her hands. The anticipation of triumph had not even been marred or weakened by premature leakage of the stored-up news; for Friday being market-day at Monkchester, no one had had time to come dropping in during the forenoon to question and hear; and the more distant neighbours did not know so early that she had returned. So she sat in her pleasant drawing-room, thinking how sweet the country looked after hot, dusty Paris, and how small the delights of Paris would be if one had no one to talk them over with; when, quite half an hour before she could have expected any one—that is, before the exact hour fixed by the social canons of Oswaldburn for calling—the door-bell rang loudly. Her heart quite jumped.

"They are in a hurry to hear!" she thought, proudly.

The drawing-room windows were at the south side of the Vicarage, the door at the north, so she could not see who her impatient visitor was.

She was not kept long in doubt. The door was hastily opened, and her nervous parlourmaid announced:

"Miss Trevorton."

Mrs. Dudley started up, and stared as if she saw a ghost. And well she might; for Helena, with her white, stern face, and angry, burning eyes, the once free stateliness of her figure stiffened into rigidity, her clothes even hanging upon her with a limp, up-all-night look, was like the ghost of her old self. Still, it was not because she took Helena for a ghost that Mrs. Dudley started and trembled. She would a hundred times rather have faced a whole churchyard full of ghosts than this outraged daughter, come to demand vengeance for her father's crime.

"I hardly expected to find you here," Helena began, in a cold, metallic voice; "I understood that you were abroad."

"I have just returned," Mrs. Dudley answered, faintly.

"Perhaps you can give me some particulars of this extraordinary conspiracy, then," said Miss Treverton, seating herself, forgetting, in sheer pre-occupation, to shake hands with Mrs. Dudley. Indeed, she had rehearsed the interview so many times, and in so many ways, that it seemed as if she and Mrs. Dudley had been together during all those hours she had spent in the train since she received her father's letter on the preceding evening, and the polite forms of meeting were unthought of in such a crash of calamity.

But Mrs. Dudley was fully alive to the fact that she and Miss Treverton had not met for some time, and that she was being treated with even more rudeness than usual. Perception of this fact, and determination that she who was favoured with the confidential friendship of the powers that were should not allow herself to be contemned by the power that had been, steadied her nerve and cleared her brain. She saw the deep traces of agony and humiliation on her enemy's face, and she exulted.

"Conspiracy? I have heard of none," she replied, as haughtily as Helena could have spoken herself.

Helena was at a loss. Anger, pride, and curiosity were all drawing different ways. She had been acting on a succession of impulses that cool reflection would have counteracted. The first, on reading her father's letter, had been to rush from Carlaurie before the news had reached any one else there, that they might not witness her agony of shame. The second had been to come direct to the Vicarage, on hearing at the station, through her maid and the station-master, that Mrs. Dudley was at home. The first had been repented of all the way in the train; it would have been better to stay with her uncle and aunt, who would have sympathised and helped her. The second was repented of now in the Vicarage drawing-room; it was horribly humiliating to have come here for news of her own father's marriage, to discuss his disgrace with a stranger.

"My father tells me you were present," she said, constraining her voice to utter intelligible words in spite of the dryness of her lips and tongue.

"Yes, I was at the wedding."

"Wedding!" Her face crimsoned, her eyes blazed, and her voice broke the chain of restraint, and rose to trembling wrath. "I did not mean that. There was no wedding—he told me—you were in Paris."

The words came from her so disjointedly that Mrs. Dudley punctuated them for herself into a wrong meaning.

"No wedding! Why, I saw them married myself," she exclaimed, indignantly. "Told you there was no wedding? Now, I call that very wrong, though he is your father."

"Then it did take place?"

A sharp pang had smitten poor Helena. She had had a faint hope that, as her father had written the night before, something might have intervened to stop the wedding.

"Certainly it took place. It seemed a dreadfully hurried affair—no breakfast or anything," Mrs. Dudley went on, in a sympathising tone, struggling to serve both masters by soothing Helena, and yet committing herself to nothing condemnatory of Sir Everard; calculating at the same time how to serve her own interest by finding out which side would be uppermost in the end, and to keep herself blameless; "but it is done and cannot be undone. It is painful for you, Miss Treverton; but time works wonders. For your father's sake you will try to become reconciled to it."

"I understand my duty to my father perfectly," returned Helena, icily. "As for it's not being undone, that is nonsense. It must be undone at once."

"That is impossible!" Mrs. Dudley remarked.

"It is impossible in one sense. What has never been done cannot be undone; and this marriage is quite invalid. I am on my way to see our solicitors—not for advice, but that they may write to my father on the subject, as, of course, I cannot correspond with him while this person is with him."

"Quite invalid!" exclaimed Mrs. Dudley, turning pale; "do you mean there is another husband?"

"Nothing more likely. But without such a sensational dénouement, the marriage would be invalid. My father has acted under undue influence—"

"But that only applies to wills," put in Mrs. Dudley.

Helena silenced her with a peremptory gesture:

"He could not take such a step without consulting his relations. He is peculiarly situated—the last in the direct line of our family. He is not free to act—"

"Excuse me, Miss Trevorton, but it is only kindness to tell you that you are indulging in false hopes. A man of his age, who is perfectly sane, may marry whom he pleases. No law in the world would require that he should have had his daughter's consent."

Helena's eyes blazed with anger.

"That is a question on which you may be sure I shall consult our solicitors, though I am quite certain of it in my own mind. I did not think of troubling you to give me a legal opinion. What I require is, that if any rumours of his marriage should reach Oswaldburn, you will kindly silence them by saying that they are untrue."

"Untrue! when I was a witness to the marriage? You ask me to tell a deliberate and perfectly useless lie, since the marriage is in all the papers, and Sir Everard will make no secret of it now."

"You were a witness to what was no marriage at all!" repeated Helena, impatiently. "Why was it kept a secret? Why was it hurried on so, if it was a marriage like any other? I tell you it will be annulled. It shall be!"

"Miss Trevorton, believe me, I sympathise with you deeply"—Helena flung a glance of disdain at the unasked sympathy—"but I must repeat that nothing can annul such a marriage. You talked of conspiracy—do you mean to accuse me of being an accomplice in a conspiracy?"

"The secrecy proves there was something disreputable in the proceeding—something against the woman, of course."

"You do think there may be another husband?" exclaimed Mrs. Dudley, startled; "that is the only ground on which the marriage could be null and void."

"I have not considered that point; it is not required to make out the case. Setting aside the points I have already mentioned, a foreign marriage can always be annulled; they are very often invalid through some irregularity. I have known of many cases. It is most fortunate that it took place in Paris. As for your share in the affair—"

"Mrs. Smith and Miss Jenkins."

Never was interruption more welcome as far as Mrs. Dudley was concerned. Helena stared in haughty amazement at the intruders, and then at the Vicar's wife, who had allowed the intrusion.

She turned her head, bowed stiffly, and said:

"Excuse me, Mrs. Dudley is engaged. Would you kindly wait a few minutes?"

"The dining-room, Mary. So sorry, Mrs. Smith," said Mrs. Dudley, hastily, but full of fussy delight. She had seen surprise and intense interest enough in her visitors' countenances to make up for all she had suffered from Helena. Her self-importance returned all at once, and gave her courage; the hope of what the next hour's paradise would be shone sweetly upon her disturbed soul. Everything assumed a brighter, better shape. What if Helena were right? What if the marriage could be annulled? It was quite possible, too, that there was some mystery about Beatrice that would strengthen Helena's case. If things should be wrong, would she not do well to be out of the business as soon as possible? The words "accomplice" and "conspiracy" had a most uncomfortable ring in them. In any case, why actually oppose Helena? Why not keep in with everybody?

"I do not understand these law matters," she said, apologetically. "It would be too shocking if your father had been deceived. Deep as my sympathy is for you, Miss Trevorton, I cannot help feeling as if she had injured me, too, in a lesser degree, for drawing me into it. I am too unsuspicious. It never occurs to me that others may not be what they seem."

The apologetic tone and the implied abandonment of private judgement somewhat mollified Helena. She held out her hand, saying:

"I must go. There is no time to lose. I acquit you of all blame, Mrs. Dudley, except of weakness and carelessness. You can atone for that by giving me—or rather the lawyers—what assistance you can. No doubt many things will recur to your memory which you had thought of slight importance at the time."

THE EXTRA

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OF

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## "MERRY, MERRY BOYS."

BY B. L. FARJEON.

Author of "*Blade-o'-Grass*," "*Great Porter Square*," "*Grif*," etc.

### CHAPTER I.

GRANDMAMMA LONGMORE'S PECULIAR WAYS, AND A LITTLE GOSSIP ABOUT MYSELF.

UP to a certain time in their lives they were never tired of speaking of the days when they were boys together, and when we were all together of an evening it was delightful to hear them break out into the song,

When we were boys,  
Merry, merry boys,  
When we were boys together.

Grandmamma Longmore would join in, and insist upon being one of the boys, who were so bound up in each other that it seemed impossible that anything in the world—any change in their circumstances, such as one growing rich and the other growing poor—could part them.

Always in my remembrance, from the

first day on which I saw her, during the many, many years that I was with her and them, did Grandmamma Longmore's voice shake and pipe, her head, which I used to think must be set on springs, shaking sympathetically as she spoke, or laughed, or sang. She had an extraordinary opinion of her vocal powers, which opinion, from courtesy and out of deference to her age, we never disputed; but the truth of the matter is, it was not possible for her to sing in tune; and the two firm friends, Benjamin Longmore, her son, and Philip Ollier, no relation at all, would bear with her awhile, and then burst out laughing: whereat Grandmamma Longmore, quite unconscious of the cause of their merriment, would pause a moment, and then join them in laughing as she had joined them in singing. She was a very old old lady, and neither the printer nor the reader is to suppose I have made a mistake in using the word "old" twice. When she first took up her residence in her son's house, her appearance was ancient and faded in the extreme, and so it remained for the many years during which we were together. Her exact age I cannot state, but any stranger would have guessed it at between eighty and a hundred. A mysterious old

lady was she in her whims and ways, and, although exhibiting no signs of mental decay, one who had to be carefully looked after. Her favourite proverb, which she was never tired of dinging into the ears of her young auditors, was the old-fashioned "Early to bed, and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise." Healthy she certainly was, but certainly not wealthy; nor was she accounted wise in Benjamin Longmore's house. She practised what she preached. Unless there was something stirring she wished to pry into, when she would grimly and patiently sit us all out, she went to bed early, and rose early in the morning, making her appearance regularly at the breakfast-table; but if we left her there when the meal was over, and returned to the room a few minutes afterwards, we invariably found the sugar basin empty. It was useless to ask her where the sugar had gone to. She would look at us innocently, and exclaim :

" The idea of asking me such a question ! You must be growing childish."

If Benjamin Longmore were aware of this comical disappearance, he would say, jocularly :

" Oh, mother's got a sweet tooth ;" but we could not accept this explanation, for her teeth were few and far between, and it was not possible that she could have devoured so large a quantity of sugar in so short a time.

She had her own private room in the house, which was cleaned every day under her personal superintendence, and the key of which, attached by a string to some part of her person, she kept in her pocket. None of us dared to enter this apartment without invitation. Occasionally she would take one of us into her sanctum, and, after locking the door, and going through a performance bearing a mild resemblance to the villain in a melodrama when he is about to commit a dreadful deed, would draw from two antiquated, hair-covered trunks a number of packets, which she would place in rows on the table, and say :

" My dear, when I am gone all these are yours. I have left them to you in my will. Don't whisper it to a soul in the house."

She never opened the packets, and we were therefore left in a state of tantalising anxiety as to the nature of the inheritance she thus bequeathed to us; but it subsequently transpired that she was in the

habit of making this statement to every person in the establishment, and that she only went through the form when she desired a favour or an obligation from the particular person with whom she was closeted.

There were other things missing besides sugar, some of which, when we got used to her, we succeeded in recovering, and if we did not make a fuss, it was because the missing articles were generally of little value. That I may not convey a wrong impression of Grandmamma Longmore, I must say at once that, with the exception of these small peccadilloes, and of certain small, artful, and mysterious ways, excusable in a person of her age, she was by no means objectionable. One of her pleasantest characteristics was the delight she took in her grandchild, Grace, and Grace's boy-lover, Edward Ollier. Benjamin Longmore and Philip Ollier were both widowers, each left with one child, and the affection which existed between them was transmitted to their children, who, with the amused consent of their parents, entered into a matrimonial engagement very early in life—before they got into their teens, indeed. But this is running ahead of matters, and I had best explain how it came about that I held an honoured and responsible position in Benjamin Longmore's family.

As it is not my own history I am relating, I shall be brief as respects myself. Blessed with good parents, who gave me an excellent education, I found myself an orphan at a critical period in a young girl's life. My father died when I was sixteen years of age, and I followed my mother to the grave a year afterwards. I remember vividly how those about me sought to dissuade me from paying this last tribute of honoured love to one I idolised, and who idolised me, their argument being that it was not usual for a lady of my standing to follow the remains of any one dear to her, that duty being left to the male representatives of the family. I did not understand this at the time, and I do not understand it now. It was not for the reason that there were no immediate male relations of my dear mother to pay this final tribute to her memory that I disregarded the counsel of my friends; had there been many I should have insisted upon my right to drop a few loose flowers into her grave. Then, as regards my social position, my friends, of course, believed that property

had fallen to me upon the death of my parents. I alone knew that they were mistaken, for I had learned that I was thrown upon the world absolutely without means, and that I had to depend upon my own exertions for subsistence. When my friends learned this they fell off from me, and took but little interest in my welfare. I do not reproach them, for I know it is common, and the way of the world.

Casting about for the best and most likely means of earning a livelihood, I bethought myself of an aunt who, during the early days of my childhood, had professed to love me. She was my godmother, and I was named after her—a somewhat stately name for an ordinary English girl, Felicia. My parents, however, or one of them, had in some way offended this lady, and she had withdrawn her favour from them and me. But now, being alone in the world, I wrote to her, and, informing her of my sad bereavement and helpless position, asked her to help me. She wrote back at once, saying she was not rich, but that she would be willing to receive me in her home as a companion. I gladly accepted the offer, and went to her, and lived with her for eighteen years, at the end of which I was still single, and somewhat too far advanced in life to hope to be anything else.

"You will die an old maid," my aunt used to say to me, and as I am considerably older now than I was then, there is not the least doubt that she uttered a true prophecy. I had my girl-dreams, but they have faded away, and, I am thankful to say, have left no bitterness behind them.

When I joined my aunt, no allusion was made to any allowance for my services, and I make mention of this to prove how unworldly I was, for it was no idle life I led in her house. I was not only her companion, but her housekeeper and nurse, and I had a fair right to expect that some small provision would be made for me. But for the second time I found myself, at my aunt's death, thrown upon the world without resources. The lady I had served was not entirely to blame. Years before I entered her house she had invested her small fortune in a life annuity, and she had no money to leave to me or any one. Her wardrobe was bequeathed to me, and I was thankful for the legacy. It was a good wardrobe, and to this day her dresses are useful to me; and a few

odd pieces of lace she used to wear on state occasions enable me to appear as a lady.

During the years I was with her I learned a great deal. I had no dressmakers' bills to pay, for I made my own dresses, and am rather vain of my accomplishments in the way of cutting, and altering, and turning—in other words, in trimming old lamps till they look like new. If I had daughters of my own, I should be most careful to instruct them in this art, and I have no doubt they would live to appreciate it at its proper worth.

While living with my aunt I learned other lessons than how to cut and snip: among them the lesson of patience and toleration, upon which too high a value cannot be set. My parents had left me no worldly possessions; but they had transmitted to me an equable disposition, which would have served me in good stead in any circumstances in life. This was the groundwork of qualities of temper and judgement which saved me from many miseries, especially from that unhappy inclination with which numbers of mortals are endowed—of going forward to meet troubles half-way.

I do not say this in praise of myself. I state it merely as an explanation of my good fortune in obtaining the goodwill and confidence of those upon whom I have been to a great extent dependent. From the time I was thrown penniless upon the world to the present day, I have lived in two homes only—in that of my aunt, and afterwards in the house of Benjamin Longmore.

Thus I have been spared the vicissitudes with which most others in my position have been afflicted; and I ascribe it chiefly to my inheritance of mental and moral qualities by the unconscious exercise of which I have gained affection which has sweetened my days.

My aunt had what is generally described as a "trying" temper; but though in early years she caused me to shed many secret tears, I never had a difficulty with her, and we lived together in peace and harmony.

"Felicia," she said on her death-bed, "I have not behaved justly towards you, and it is too late now to repair my error. Think kindly of me when I am gone, and do not worry about your future. Things are sure to come right."

She was as correct in this prognostication as she was in the prophecy that I shall die an old maid.

## CHAPTER II.

## I ENTER THE SERVICE OF BENJAMIN LONGMORE.

WELL, there I was at thirty-four years of age homeless for the second time in my life, and on the look-out for a situation. I was as fortunate then as I have always been. Seeing an advertisement in a newspaper of good repute for a companion to a young mother in a delicate state of health, I replied to it, and was invited to call upon Mr. Longmore, in the north of London. There was a hint in the advertisement that the applicant must be competent to perform certain responsible duties in the direction of a small household. There was nothing in the management of a house for which I did not consider myself fully competent; and without any fears upon this head, I obeyed Mr. Longmore's summons. He was a pleasant-mannered gentleman, and he informed me that a great number of letters had been sent in answer to his advertisement—which I could well believe, knowing how overcrowded are the ranks in all occupations—and that his wife had selected my application as the one which most recommended itself to her. I saw that he was in some anxiety concerning his wife, and that he intended to exercise scrupulous care in his choice of a companion for her.

"Be kind enough to tell me all about yourself."

I gave him a faithful description of my career and circumstances, and he observed that it was unjust on the part of my aunt to leave me entirely without resources after so long a service.

"I make no complaint against her," I said. "She offered me a home when I had none, and I was happy with her."

"You had a claim upon her."

"Scarcely more than a sentimental claim. Had she lived, and wished to pay me a salary, she would have had to deprive herself of luxuries to which she was accustomed. I do not think I should have consented to that."

"You were not very worldly," said Mr. Longmore, looking at me attentively; "but have grown wiser, no doubt."

"I am not extravagant in my expectations," I replied, with a smile; his meaning was so clear.

"We are not rich people," he said. "The question is, whether you would be

satisfied with our home, in which we have to be economical, and with the modest salary I can afford to offer you."

"I think I should be quite satisfied," I said. "The question rather is whether I should suit you and your wife; and that can only be answered by giving me a trial."

"You see," he said, "what I require in the house is a practical person, and your indifference to your own interests is not a good guarantee."

"Perhaps," I said, with an inward compliment to myself for my shrewdness, "I can look after the interests of others better than I can my own."

A remark which seemed to give him a better opinion of my abilities.

"Go and talk to my wife," he said. "I desired to see you first, honestly to be able to approve of you. If you please her, we will speak of terms; though the mischief is," he added, "that her eyes are in her heart, while mine are in my head."

He took me himself to his wife's room, and I made the acquaintance of a lady whose sweetness and gentleness were like stars of peace and love in the home blessed by her presence. She was fragile and delicate—I saw that at a glance—and on her lap lay an infant, one year and one day old, as the fond mother informed me. This child was my dear Grace, who was as happy in her inheritance of moral and mental qualities as I was myself; but her character will unfold itself as my story progresses. Only one thing must be mentioned: her virtues sprang from her mother, in whose nature there was no hidden mystery which, under the stress of evil circumstances, would have laid bare to the eyes of the world vices which slept when temptation was far away. Her soul was the incarnation of purity and sinlessness, as white and unstained as falling snow.

The moment I saw Mrs. Longmore my heart went out to her; and that hers beat responsiveness to mine I soon had proof. Our first interview was not a long one. She was not strong, and after some necessary questions had been asked and answered, I rose to take my leave. I had already made friends with baby, and though I saw I had produced a good impression, I began to fear—so earnest was my desire to enter this happy home—that Mr. Longmore's verdict might be against me. Mrs. Longmore had risen from the sofa to receive me, and before I went from the room I

assisted her on to it again, and put baby in a low swinging cradle on a level with the loving mother's face as she lay down.

"It is all arranged, then," said Mrs. Longmore, with anxiety no less than my own.

I looked at Mr. Longmore, and he asked me to return to the room I had left, where he would presently join me. I closed the door softly after me; and as I caught a glimpse of him bending tenderly over his wife, I knew that my fate was being discussed.

I had not long to wait for the verdict. Mr. Longmore came in, and said that his wife wished that I should be engaged. I replied that I was very glad, and enquired when I should come.

"We have to settle about terms," he remarked. "What are your views as to salary?"

I named a sum per annum, which he said was ridiculously low; but so apprehensive was I that there should be no obstacle on my part to the engagement, that I insisted it would be sufficient.

"Very well," he said, "let it be as you suggest. We can come to a more equitable arrangement when we discover whether we suit each other."

On the following day I entered his service, and his home has been mine ever since. It was a happy home, saddened though it was by a grievous and irreparable loss which fell upon it when Grace was four years old. The duties devolving upon me I carried out almost from the first week of my arrival. Mrs. Longmore required not only a companion for herself and child, but a housekeeper as well; and I was soon in possession of all the keys. The family grew to depend upon me and to love me, and I grew to love them as truly as if they had been of my blood. Ah, how it grieved me to observe that my dear mistress was gradually but surely wasting away! As week after week passed by, her face became more delicate, her hands and fingers more transparent. She used to amuse her child by placing her hand before the candle and letting the light shine through it. Grace was too young to comprehend the significance of this pathetic pastime—too young to guess that the dear mother was travelling steadily on to the valley and the shadow of death.

Mrs. Longmore never murmured or repined; and of all those around her I think

I was the only one who truly realised what was coming.

Philip Ollier, already a widower, and his little boy, Ned, lived very near, and visited us regularly; and Mrs. Longmore would lie back in her easy-chair and contemplate the picture of the two children sitting close together, looking over a picture-book, or playing with their toys.

"I wonder whether it will ever be?" she whispered to me.

I glanced at the children, and then at Mrs. Longmore.

"Poor Ned is without a mother," she said, still in a whisper, "and my darling Grace soon will be."

She caught my hand, and pressed it convulsively.

"Hush! hush!" I murmured, and I passed my hand across her forehead, smoothing her hair away, and calming her as best I could.

This action of mine invariably had a soothing effect upon her.

That night, when Grace was asleep, and her mother and I were alone, Mrs. Longmore said:

"I have been trying to dream for weeks and weeks past of the future. Before going to sleep I have said to myself a hundred times, 'My dear child's future—what will it be, what will it be? Let me see it in my dreams.' But I have never once dreamt of her. Is it not strange?"

"Dreams have ever been a mystery to me," I said; "how they come and go, and whether there is any real meaning in them. But, dear Mrs. Longmore, you should not excite yourself; it is not good for you."

"Miss Felicia," she said—it was in those terms all in the house addressed me—"nothing can alter what will be, what must be; nothing can retard it, nothing can hasten it. Open my desk; thank you. You will see under the papers there two sealed letters, without any address on them; they are in pink envelopes. Yes, those are they. Bring them here, and open the smaller one, please."

I did as she directed, and drew forth a sheet of paper, on the inner page of which was written, "I shall die the first week in September," in her own handwriting. It was her death sentence, pronounced by herself. My heart chilled as I gazed upon the ominous words; but my dear mistress was quite calm. Recovering myself, I ventured to ask whether she was wise in

giving way to such fancies. With a smile, sad and sweet, she shook her head.

"They are not fancies, Miss Felicia. There exist within me certain convictions, the fulfilment of which is fixed and unalterable. I can measure the time allotted to me, and I know that I shall die at the time I have set down. In September my darling will be motherless."

"I am sure, I am sure," I urged, "that it is not good to dwell upon such matters, and to make up one's mind to what will transpire in the future. We are all in the hands of a merciful Judge, who knows best what is best for us."

"I bow my head to Him," she said, reverently folding her hands, "and it is in submission, not in rebellion, that I have written those words. Miss Felicia, I wrote them for your eyes alone to see. I would not grieve my dear husband by showing them to him. Destroy the paper, and dip the pen in the ink for me."

I gave her the pen, and she wrote my name on the envelope that remained.

"You will not open it," she said, "till I am gone. Miss Felicia, Heaven sent you to my house; you are my solace, my comforter. I am humbly grateful."

"You overrate my services," I said. "I love you most truly."

"Love my child," she said, earnestly.

"I do, with my whole heart and soul."

"Love her always; never desert her. She may need by her side, when she is a woman, one as wise and tender as yourself. I have the fullest faith in you; I know you to be good and right-minded. I look forward to what is coming with resignation, because I feel that you will take my place with my dear, and be to her what I should have been if my life were spared."

I was inexpressibly affected by this sacred mark of confidence, and, in words as forcible as I could command, I assured her that I would prove worthy of it. When we were both calmer she said:

"Miss Felicia, had you your choice, would you rather be rich or poor—for happiness, I mean?"

I replied, speaking not for myself alone, but in a general way, that we could be happy in either condition, and that our aim should be to make the best use of the means at our command, whether they were large or small.

"But how seldom that is done," she observed. "Great good fortune is hard

to bear; it changes our natures sometimes—too often, I am afraid. Those pleasures are not the sweetest which are the easiest gained. Money, which should be our servant, becomes our master, and the power it bestows frequently turns good into evil. It may sound strange, but as we pray to be delivered from temptation, so, if there were many years of life before me, I should pray to be delivered from the burden of great wealth."

Although I dimly recognised the force of her utterances, it was not until long after she was laid to rest that I fully realised their application to those whom she held most dear.

### CHAPTER III.

BENJAMIN LONGMORE AND PHILIP OLLIER EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS ON THE SUBJECT OF MONEY.

THE conversation I have recorded took place in the month of June. The summer of that year was a delightful season, and the fine weather seemed to have a wonderful effect upon Mrs. Longmore's health. There was a tender gaiety in her spirits which spread through the whole house—like sunshine.

"She is growing stronger," said Mr. Longmore, in a happy voice. "She will be her old self again presently."

He was tenderly attached to his wife, and was unremitting in his attentions and in his care for her; so far as his means would allow he surrounded her with everything that could make life pleasant and enjoyable, and it was not in her nature to sadden these evidences of love by one word of repining. She had a great admiration for her husband's friend, Philip Ollier, and spoke to me of his character in the highest terms.

"There, at least," she said, "is a man whom riches would not spoil. He would know how to use them to a good end; I hope Ned will take after him."

"There is no reason why he should not," I said. "Mr. Ollier says he is going to educate his son himself, and the little fellow's ways already comically resemble those of his father."

We had both noted this with amusement. Philip Ollier had a trick of walking up and down with his hands clasped behind him when he was debating any important matter, and Ned, when any

small matter was in his mind, unconsciously fell into the same habit ; and it used to bring a smile to my lips, and some wonder also to my mind, when I saw in the lad these reproductions of his father's peculiarities. I, too, in common with my dear mistress, had a high opinion of Philip Ollier, whose views were in singular accord with hers ; but I remember that it once struck me as strange that in her confidential conversations with me she never alluded to her husband in the same association. She spoke of him always with exceeding tenderness, but yet occasionally with a note of pity, as though she believed it was almost a vital point that he should be ever within the reach of some purifying influence to which he could bow, and by which he could be persuaded to be directed. After this thought occurred to me, I revolved the subject in my mind, and studied the opinions and views of the two friends with more care than I had hitherto given to them ; and upon a certain occasion, when Mrs. Longmore was not present, the opportunity of some enlightenment was afforded to me.

"I heard of an old friend to-day," said Philip Ollier, mentioning the name of the friend, which I cannot recall ; it is of no importance, not being necessary to my story, so I will call him Jones.

"Indeed," said Benjamin Longmore. "Jones, who was at school with us, you mean ?"

"The same. That fair-haired, thick-lipped boy, who spoke with a lisp, and used to get flogged about twice a week."

"I haven't given him a thought for years," observed Benjamin Longmore. "He was not the kind of schoolfellow that lives in one's memory. His father was a pawnbroker, wasn't he ?"

"Yes, Ben," replied Philip Ollier, "and we decided it was just the kind of business that Jones was cut out for, and that he hadn't a soul above buttons. Of all the boys in our acquaintance he was the one who was the least likely to do anything remarkable. We were mistaken ; he has done something very remarkable."

"You surprise me. What is it ?"

"He has made a great fortune."

"Made it ?" exclaimed Benjamin Longmore.

"Made it," said Philip Ollier.

"By himself ? Out of his own head ?"

"Out of his own head—a shrewder head than we supposed it to be."

"How did he make it ?" asked Ben-

jamin Longmore, and an unusual excitement in his voice caused me to raise my eyes to his face.

"By speculation. He has actually been promoting companies ; got hold of a mine somewhere in the Polar regions, and swept into his purse no end of money—thousands, hundreds of thousands. He has bought a famous estate—not in the Polar regions—and talks of entering Parliament."

"He will be a credit to the House. How in the world did he manage it ?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, except, as I have said, that he is cleverer than we gave him credit for being."

Benjamin Longmore drummed on the table with his fingers, and there were puckers in his face.

"Look here, Phil," he said. "Jones was a dunce and a fool at school."

"He was ; the biggest dunce and the biggest fool of the lot."

"It hardly seems fair, does it ?"

"I don't catch your meaning."

"Why, that this addle-pate should become suddenly so rich, while we——"

"Well, Ben," said Philip Ollier, prompting the conclusion of the sentence. "While we——"

"Are as we are."

"Very cosy and comfortable, I think," said Philip Ollier, looking around the room.

"You don't care for money, Phil."

"Don't I ?" retorted Philip Ollier. "I wish I had more than I could carry."

"And yet you don't envy Jones."

"Not a bit. He is quite welcome to his luck, so far as I am concerned. As long as a man is comfortable and has enough, he wants little more, in my opinion."

"He does want more," said Benjamin Longmore, speaking slowly ; "he wants money. It is the greatest power in the world ; it can accomplish everything. With it a man is a prince, a king ; without it, he is a dummy."

"Seriously, now, Ben," said Philip Ollier, "would you like to be a king ?"

"Would I like it ? Show me the man who wouldn't."

"Look at me, then. If the burden had been thrown on my shoulders as a birth-right, I should have had to bear it ; but to have the choice, and not run away from it —no, no, Ben. I happen to know when I'm well off. No crown for Philip Ollier, thank you."

"Where's your common-sense ?" asked Benjamin Longmore. "Who are the men

who hold places in the world, who are bowed down to and looked up to, and talked about, who have power? The men who have money; all the others are drudges, or puppets, or slaves."

"Take the whole of the responsibility, Ben. Upon present evidence I will have none of it."

"That's not like you, Phil, to shirk an argument."

"I don't shirk it. I have simply come to some sort of conclusion upon certain matters, and entertain opinions respecting them, which are, of course, subject to correction. Of all the birds in the air, is the eagle the most to be envied? There's many a small bird I think I had rather be. You can carry on the simile, Ben, to the seas and the forests."

"I have also," said Benjamin Longmore, "come to some sort of conclusion upon certain matters, and entertain opinions respecting them——"

"Which," interrupted Philip Oliver, laughing, "are, like my own, open to correction, I hope."

"I don't know about that. One day I intend to be fabulously rich. I want to know how it feels."

"All right," said Philip Ollier; "when that day comes tell me how you feel, and I'll see whether it's worth while."

I listened in amazement and sorrow to Benjamin Longmore's views. Had they been expressed in his usual manner they might not have so deeply impressed me; but I had never heard him speak with such intense feeling as on this occasion. Moreover, the discussion in which he was engaged seemed to change his character. His face, generally so pleasant, became crafty, and there was a cunning, greedy look in his eyes it pained me to see. I was glad my dear mistress was not present to see it and to hear what he said. I thought of her words:

"Great good fortune is hard to bear. It changes our natures sometimes—too often, I am afraid."

And again:

"Money, which should be our servant, becomes our master, and the power it bestows frequently turns good into evil."

Were these remarks made with special reference to one who was dear to her, or did they spring merely from her observation of the general affairs of life? Did she fear that there lurked in her husband's nature a spirit of evil which some malignant influence might cause to leap into existence?

I had had already some experience of Benjamin Longmore, and it was entirely in his favour. He was courteous, kind, and considerate, and he had a profound love for his wife and child; but if he were tried in the fire of great prosperity, how would it be with him?

In the midst of these anxious musings I looked up and saw him as I had been in the habit of seeing him: pleasant-mannered, and with an agreeable expression on his face. He and his friend were speaking upon another subject, and I detected no discordant note in their voices. Presently, they joined in a hearty laugh, which rang like music through the room. I was greatly relieved, and I inwardly reproached myself for the silent injustice I had done my master.

"Do not be so hasty in your judgements, Felicia," I said to myself.

#### CHAPTER IV.

#### MON REPOS.

On a fine day in July my mistress and I, accompanied by Benjamin Longmore and Philip Ollier, took a drive in the country, Barnet way, in accordance with the advice of the doctor, who wished Mrs. Longmore to have the benefit of the soft, warm air when the weather was entirely favourable. At that period the country through which we drove was very charming, but of late years the part nearest to London has been swallowed up, as it were, by the demands of the mammoth City, and its rural beauty is, unhappily, entirely destroyed. One spot, however, at which we halted, still retains its charm. Within but a short distance of the city of unrest, it seems to be embedded in the heart of the country, and to be removed far away from the fever of London life. The fragrant hedges have not been cut away, the picturesque narrow lanes are as they have been for centuries past, and when the nightingale visits England, its song fills the air with melody.

"Do you remember, Ben?" asked Philip, pointing to a pair of handsome gates which guarded the entrance to a private property, in which the beauties of Nature had evidently been enhanced by human culture and taste. A winding carriage path had been formed between thick clusters of shining laurels; how far

it went we could not see, but Philip Ollier afterwards told us that it led to one of the most beautiful houses in England, and that in the twenty acres of ground by which it was surrounded, were stables, orchards, pleasure and kitchen gardens, and everything that could contribute to man's happiness and the enjoyment of life. On a plate affixed to the gate was a tablet, bearing the inscription, in raised letters of silver, "Mon Repos."

It was fitly named. A holy stillness pervaded the scene, amidst which this perfect estate was embedded; it might have been the abode of the spirit of peace.

"Yes, Phil," said Benjamin Longmore, "I remember."

We turned towards the friends for an explanation.

"Well," said Philip Ollier, "there is a little tale hanging to it. With Ben's permission, I will relate the story."

"Of course Ben gives permission," said Mrs. Longmore.

"Of course I do," assented her husband.

"It commenced," said Philip Ollier, "a long time ago, when we were boys together—eh, Ben?"

"Yes, Phil."

"And very young boys, too," continued Philip Ollier. "You, Mrs. Longmore, do not need to be told, but Miss Felicia does, perhaps, that when we were at school we were the closest of friends, and the chummiest of chums. Had we been twin brothers we could not have been fonder of each other, and some of our schoolmates used to say that one of us ought to have been a girl. In those days we were in the habit of visiting a gardener who had been in my father's service; he lived a mile further on, and is now heaven knows where. Almost always when we had a holiday it was our custom to spend it in this part of the country. One day we noticed a great stir upon this very spot—carts, horses, bricks, masses of granite and marble, and a host of labourers. 'Hallo,' said we, 'what's going on here?' We were told that a gentleman had bought the ground, and was going to build a wonderful house upon it. A little later we saw a number of trees, with their roots carefully protected, brought here, and were told they were trees from foreign countries which were going to be planted in the grounds. The news excited us, and we began to take an interest in the affair,

weaving all sorts of fancies in connection with the trees and their owner, wanting to know whether he was a foreign prince or a magician, and what kind of magic flowers or fruit the trees would bear. In short, we magnified it into a romance which in some way was connected with ourselves. Our friend the gardener happened to get employment here, and through him we made friends with others who were superintending the operations, and by a judicious or injudicious distribution of tips, which made terrible holes in our pocket-money, were allowed to come and go as privileged visitors. We saw the foundations laid and the walls grow; and we used to say to each other when a holiday was planned, that we wondered how our grand palace was getting on. Our palace, mind. The more we saw of it the keener became our interest, and it got to be our favourite subject of conversation. We said that when we were men it was such a house and grounds as we should like to own. 'It is worth working for,' said Ben, once. 'Well,' said I, partly in fun, and just a little bit in earnest, 'let us work for it.' 'All right,' said Ben, quite seriously, 'we will work for it.' 'But after all,' said I, coming to my sober senses, 'that is nonsense; it can never be anything more to us than a castle in the air.' 'I don't agree with you,' said Ben—he was always much more in earnest and more serious about things, Mrs. Longmore, than I—'I don't agree with you. I make up my mind, now and here, that one of these days I will be its master. When I am rich enough I shall buy it.' Boys are aggressively emulative, and I was no exception to the rule. 'If you make up your mind,' said I, 'to become master here, I shall make up my mind to do the same.' 'Very well,' said Ben, taking me seriously, as usual, 'let it be a race between us. Is it agreed?' 'Yes,' I replied, and then a possible difficulty occurred to me; 'but suppose the owner will not sell it when the time comes? There are a good many years between now and then,' said Ben, with a wise shake of his head; 'a thousand things will happen before we are ready.' So this compact, entered into in a spirit of wildness, became binding, and exists at the present day—we being," added Philip Ollier, laughing heartily, "as far off as ever from its accomplishment. Eh, Ben?"

"We are certainly no nearer to it," said Benjamin Longmore. "But before I die I shall be master of *Mon Repos*."

I stared at him, he spoke with such

absolute conviction. He simply nodded, and said :

" You will see."

" Did you know its name," I asked, " when your minds were made up to purchase it, willy-nilly, from the owner ? "

" No," replied Philip Ollier ; " it was not till everything was finished that those silver letters were fixed on the gate."

" And who is the owner ? " enquired Mrs. Longmore.

Philip Ollier laughed again.

" We have not the slightest idea ; it is an absurd feature in this disposal of his property that we never set eyes on him. It is clear he must be a gentleman of taste and refinement, for, though we were not fortunate enough to make his acquaintance—which was a pity, you know, for he might have said to us : ' What is the use of waiting ? take it now '—we understood that everything was being done under his direction and in accordance with his own design. To build and furnish the house ; to lay out the grounds and cut the walks ; to plant the foreign trees, etc., etc., took four years, and during the whole of that time we never missed an opportunity of watching their progress. We made ourselves so familiar with every detail that we could draw a plan of the rooms and garden, and tell you the fashion of much of the furniture and belongings. There are famous pictures in the house, Mrs. Longmore, if they have not been removed. We saw them carried in, and on more than one occasion were permitted to enter the apartments while the furniture was being arranged. It was the whim of the owner not to take up his residence in the house till it was thoroughly ready for occupation, and it was this whim that afforded us opportunities of getting upon intimate terms with his treasures. Ben, we ought to have employed a watchman to see that none of them were taken away. The last day we were inside the grounds was at the winding-up of one of our vacations, and these handsome gates had just been brought to the place. When our holidays came round again we trudged here to see our palace, and found the gates fixed and the walls around the estate very effectually completed. I give you my word," said Philip Ollier, with a humorous twinkle in his eyes, " that we felt as if we were unlawfully debarred from entering upon our own property. There was no help for it, however ; shut out we were, and there was

no getting in. We couldn't very well ring and insist upon admittance, and if we stole an entrance by climbing over the wall, we should doubtless have been marched off to the station-house by a policeman. But to this hour we are sentimental enough to regard Mon Repos as connected with our lives in some strange way ; and if it should happen that it were destroyed by fire, I have no doubt we should look upon it as a personal loss. Of course we are a couple of fools, and, having many a year ago reached the age when the stern affairs of life compel men to bid farewell to boyish romance, there is no excuse for us."

" There is every excuse for you," said Mrs. Longmore. " What would life be without its dreams, without its air-built castles ? It does not harm us when we become men and women to dwell upon these fancies of our youth. If they do nothing more, they supply us with pleasant memories ; but they really do more than this. They soften, they humanise, they keep our hearts green."

" Phil," said Benjamin Longmore, speaking still with determination, " I stick to my guns. Project yourself mentally into the future, and behold me master of Mon Repos, where I shall hold out the hand of welcome to my dear old friend."

" Or I to you," said Philip Ollier, with odd insistence.

" Or you to me ? " responded Benjamin Longmore. " It is a race. Let the best man win."

" Or the luckiest, Ben."

" It doesn't matter much, so long as the end is reached."

" Above all," said Philip Ollier, in a low tone, which did not reach Mrs. Longmore's ears ; but I heard the remark, " let us keep it from the grasp of Jones."

A dark shade flashed into Benjamin Longmore's face, but it passed away as he gazed upon his wife.

" Mon Repos ! " she murmured. " It is an invitation to rest. How sweet to live in such a spot, after a life of toil and labour ! I can imagine no happier lot."

" You shall live to enjoy it," said Benjamin Longmore.

Mrs. Longmore sighed. I knew what she was thinking of : " I shall die the first week in September." And it was now near the end of July.

We rode quietly home, and it gladdened me to observe that the hands of husband and wife were clasped under her mantle. It is sweet to witness the spring love of

young lovers, but far sweeter to witness the love of husband and wife after some years of companionship. I could not at that time, and I do not now, comprehend the contradictions in the character of Benjamin Longmore. It is to me a mystery how tender qualities and their opposites can reside in the breast of a mortal, how a man can be loving and cruel, the soul of kindness and the soul of injustice. If in the invisible air there are, as I have read, angels and evil spirits, tempting us, pleading to us, urging us to paths of darkness and paths of light, how careful we should be in every step we take in life that affects ourselves, in every judgement we pronounce that affects the lives of those who are bound to us, who depend upon us, who draw from us the love that lightens the darkest hour, and sustains their faith and hope in the journey from the cradle to the grave !

Philip Ollier was the first to express real alarm at Mrs. Longmore's state of health. He, as well as the members of the Longmore family, held me in esteem, and overrated my services. Towards the middle of August he dropped a few words to me, which showed that he was disturbed by certain signs in Mrs. Longmore, which had forced themselves on his attention.

"All in this house," he was good enough to say, "depend upon you so much, that you are looked upon as a guide in serious matters."

Not divining to what he was about to refer, I said that life was made up of light as well as of serious matters, and that, indeed, it was small affairs which generally caused the greatest anxieties.

"That is true," he said ; "but what is in my mind is a matter of the utmost gravity. You, more than any of us, except, perhaps, Mr. Longmore, have opportunities of judging how his wife really is. If we lost her——" He paused, and I did not break the silence. He continued : "I had it in my mind to speak to Mr. Longmore, but I do not wish to distress him, I hope, unnecessarily. I am not asking you to break any confidence which may have been reposed in you, but you may be able to relieve my anxiety. To speak plainly, Mrs. Longmore appears to me to be fading away ; and every time I come to this house it is with a feeling of dread that something terrible may have occurred."

"I share your apprehensions," I said,

painfully careful in my choice of words ; "but what we are saying springs from the fear which is born of love ; it scarcely can be said to have a more solid foundation. The doctor speaks hopefully of our dear patient. We may be alarming ourselves unnecessarily, and it would be productive of mischief to let our feelings be seen."

"What pains me deeply," said Philip Ollier, "is that she never complains."

"She has the patience and the moral strength of an angel," I said. "It is not in her nature to grieve those she loves by the exhibition of selfishness in any form. Let us follow her example. We must conceal our fears, and hope for the best. Human skill and science can do no more than is being done."

He pressed my hand, and did not pursue the subject. Hope for the best ! Yes, but I felt that it was hoping against hope ; and yet, at times, so cheerful and uncomplaining was my dear mistress, that I was animated by the vision of a brighter prospect in the future.

On the first day in September, however, the dark shadow that hung over the house showed itself all too plainly.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SUN WAS SHINING, AND THE SOFT AIR FLOWED INTO THE ROOM.

THE doctor, issuing from Mrs. Longmore's room, came to me as usual to say a few words about the patient. I always received his report, and conveyed it, word for word, to Benjamin Longmore in the evening, upon his return home from business.

"Mr. Longmore is not in the house ?" he asked.

"No, sir," I replied, with a sinking heart.

I felt what was coming.

"He comes home generally at about half-past five, I believe."

"At about that time, sir," I said, clasping my hands. How pregnant are simple words upon such an occasion as this ! The doctor's commonplace remarks were as far removed from the utterance of a death warrant as could well be conceived, but as clearly as though it were written upon the wall in letters of fire, I saw the sentence pronounced.

"Well, well," said the doctor, after a moment's consideration, "there is no absolute necessity to summon him home. There is time yet, and we can wait, we can wait." He drew on his gloves thoughtfully as he spoke.

"You have bad news, sir?" I said, in a whisper.

He fixed his eyes on my face, and seemed to be studying my character, concerning which, most probably, he had not troubled himself before.

"You have the control of the domestic affairs of the house," he said, "and you are in a position of trust. Deservedly, deservedly."

"I thank you, sir; but you have not answered my question. You have bad news?"

"What we have to consider," he said, still parrying my question, from no unkindness, I am sure, "is our patient—first of all, our patient."

"She is our first consideration, sir; she is the spiritual life of this home."

"The spiritual life. Yes, that is where it is. They are grave words, Miss Felicia."

"Yes, sir, they are grave words, but they were not spoken in the sense in which you receive them."

"I cannot suppose they were; but I am sadly compelled to look upon the practical, the professional side."

"I implore you, sir, to relieve my anxiety."

He withdrew the glove he had just put on, and took my hand, and felt my pulse.

"If you will calm yourself, Miss Felicia, I will say something further. If you cannot control your feelings I shall say nothing more, and must ask you to be as little with Mrs. Longmore as possible until Mr. Longmore returns home."

"I am calm, sir."

I compelled myself to be so, and he gazed at me approvingly.

"That is better, much better; your pulse is less feverish already. What we must avoid, Miss Felicia, is any appearance of anxiety or nervousness. Your pulse continues to improve. You will obey my directions?"

"Implicitly, sir."

"I can trust you. Mrs. Longmore has the highest opinion of you, Miss Felicia, and your presence and companionship are beneficial to her. They must continue to be, for her sake, for the sake of all who are connected with her."

"They shall be, sir."

His lips quivered slightly, and it was to me an indication that he had something more than a professional regard for my dear mistress; from the highest to the lowest, every person who came into association with her loved this sweet and good woman.

"If it were possible," said the doctor, "I should wish her to see none but cheerful faces about her; but when Mr. Longmore hears what I have to say, that, perhaps, will be impossible. We must do the best we can, however."

As he seemed to wait for my assent, I said:

"Yes, sir, I understand."

"There is a grave change in Mrs. Longmore's condition. I do not say there is any immediate cause to expect the worst—that is, to-day or to-morrow—but I greatly fear it will come soon, perhaps before the week is out. It is sad, very, very sad, but all the science in the world cannot avert the Divine fiat."

"Is she suffering, sir—is she in pain?"

"I can give you a comforting answer. She is not suffering, except naturally in her heart at the thought that she will soon be separated from her husband and her child; she is not in pain. She will pass away in peace."

Something rose in my throat, and I turned my head from him; and he was good enough not to reprove me.

"We must," he continued, "all of us, do everything that lies in our power to make her last days on earth peaceful and happy. It is for that reason I wish to see Mr. Longmore myself; and you will help me in this?"

"Indeed, indeed, I will, sir."

"I shall call again twice to-day; at two o'clock to see Mrs. Longmore, and at five to see her husband."

"Are there any distressing symptoms, sir?"

"None. She is wasting away, surely and swiftly. She has but a small reserve of strength left, and that will be exhausted—too soon, too soon. It is wonderful how she has borne up, how she has managed to deceive us. But there—nothing could have been done except, perhaps"—he shook his head impatiently—"to hasten her end."

"She has no thought of herself, sir; she thinks only of those she loves."

"A good woman, Miss Felicia, a sweet

and noble lady. Heaven's gates are opening for her."

"Pardon me, sir. She shall not see me so."

I had covered my face with my hands. He took them in his own when I removed them, and gently patted them.

"And now, if you are quite strong, I will go; I have other patients to visit. If you can induce her to take some strong soup every hour, a little at a time, and half a glass of port wine—no more, Miss Felicia—so much the better. I am satisfied that I leave her in good hands. Let her child be with her as long as she desires. Thwart her in nothing; she will ask for nothing she ought not to have; she will do nothing she ought not to do. She will husband her strength, the little she has left, for the sake, as you say, of those she loves."

He bade me good morning, and left me, and I went in to my dear mistress, first bathing my eyes and face in cold water. She received me with a cheerful smile, and asked me if the doctor had been speaking to me, and I replied that he had.

"He knows all," she said; "and though he did not tell me in so many words, he feels as I feel. Is he coming again to-day?"

"Yes; at two o'clock."

"And again, after that?"

"Yes, at five, to see Mr. Longmore."

"It is very kind of him to break the news. My poor husband! How will he bear it? Miss Felicia, go and see if Gracie is asleep. If she is, do not disturb her; but leave word with the nurse that she is to bring my darling to me when she wakes. I am jealous of every moment now."

I did as she bade me, and, returning, told her that Grace was sleeping.

"How wise and beneficent is Nature!" she said. "Childhood cannot realise these sorrows. When she sees me by-and-by, she will think I am asleep."

I moved about the room, performing my duties quietly, and without any outward demonstration of grief.

"The doctor says I may have the window open if I wish. Open it, please. It is a lovely day."

The sun was shining, and the soft air flowed into the room. There were flowers on the sill, and from the garden came the sweet piping of birds.

"The world is very beautiful, Miss Felicia. It is filled with sweet marvels.

But for you I should be sorry to leave it."

"The confidence you have in me gladdens my heart, my dear mistress."

"Your dear friend, Miss Felicia."

"My dear friend," I said.

"If it were given to me to realise a wish, I should ask the Divine Arbiter to allow me to stay with my child, to see her grow into womanhood, to share her joys and sorrows; but it is not to be, and I have schooled myself to resignation and content. I think, with ineffable gratitude, that you will be by her side, and that she will have in you a counsellor and a guide; a protector from the rocks and shoals which lie in the path of young and trustful lives."

"I will devote myself to her, dear friend; but without me her own good instincts would guide her aright."

"It is my hope that she will grow into goodness and virtue. Especially do I desire that she should imbibe—as she will through you—a proper understanding of the value of the contradictory influences by which she will be surrounded; by which we are all surrounded as we travel onwards. I can raise up a picture of her as she will be in the first flush of womanhood. She will be very beautiful."

"She is sure to be. I have never seen a sweeter face."

"How I pity those who are not so endowed! Beauty is a heavenly gift, and, in association with a pure soul, unstained by worldly temptation, has a great power for good. I think of that when I think of my husband. He will be proud of Gracie. She will sweeten his life; it will give her influence over him. You will also be his friend, Miss Felicia."

"I will be all to him that he will allow me to be."

"He has a regard and a respect for you; he has spoken to me about you many times, and said how fortunate we were in finding you. He thinks you have very sound opinions."

"Except, I am afraid, that I am not worldly wise."

"Oh, yes, he believes that; but only so far as your own interests are concerned. He told me what you said about being better able, perhaps, to look after the interests of others, and he is convinced that it is so. You will take my place with my dear Gracie. I hope she will not forget me; I should like to feel that I leave an abiding memory with her, young as she is."

"She will remember you all her life."

"All her life," she murmured, "I shall watch over her."

Her eyes closed as she spoke the words. I moved softly to her side, and saw that she had fallen into slumber. The moment she awoke I brought her child to her. Shortly afterwards the doctor called again, and exchanged cheering words with her. When he left her I accompanied him to the door, and asked if there was still no hope.

"There is none," he said; "there can be none. If she is brighter to-morrow, if she seems stronger, do not deceive yourselves. The fate that hangs over her is inevitable. Miss Felicia, I would give double, treble my fees if I could save her. When Nature pronounces sentence, art is powerless."

I cannot refrain here from paying a tribute to this kind gentleman, whose life is an honour to the profession he adorns. But, indeed, in what ranks of professional labour can more unselfish kindness be found than in the ranks of those who minister to the sick? Surely there must be some beneficent influence in the work they do that humanises and softens the heart, that makes it respond willingly and cheerfully to the appeals of those who suffer?

Numberless are the instances that can be adduced of the wonderful goodness of doctors, renowned and eminent, who sacrifice their time without expectation or desire of return for the inestimable services they render. I have no hesitation in saying that, of all arts, it is the most ennobling and beautiful, and that its record of kind deeds is matchless and unapproachable. With all my heart I say, "Heaven bless the doctors for the good they do, for the good they are enabled to do!"

At half-past five Benjamin Longmore returned home. His face fell as the doctor went forward to meet him.

"Good Heaven!" he exclaimed. "What is the matter?"

I was in the room when he and the doctor met, and I left it immediately. They were closeted together for a quarter of an hour or so, and then Benjamin Longmore came out with a face like death itself.

"You must not go in to her like that, sir," I said. "You will frighten her."

He looked at me helplessly, and allowed me to lead him back to the room. The doctor had taken his departure.

"Is it true?" he muttered. "Can it be true?"

"Be strong, my dear master," I said. "I can offer you no consolation, but, for the sake of the dear sufferer, be strong!"

"Oh, my wife, my darling!" he cried, and covering his face with his hands, burst into tears.

I did not disturb him; one's nature, whether it be demonstrative or placid, must assert itself, and in matters so sorrowful as this it is best that the first ebullition of feeling should be unchecked. Therefore I did not direct or attempt to control him, but waited till he regained command of himself. This he did quite suddenly, to my surprise; and even in that moment of grief I could not help thinking that, although I had lately devoted much attention to the study of Benjamin Longmore's character, there were depths in it which I had not yet sounded. As I have said, he gained command over his feelings quite suddenly, and I saw from his manner that he was not likely to allow them to sway him in his wife's presence.

"Can I see her now?" he asked, in an humble tone.

"Yes, sir," I replied. "You will remember that it will be for her good not to give way."

He nodded, and we went together to Mrs. Longmore's room. It was as much as I could do to keep my tears back when I witnessed how she received him. With infinite tenderness and sweet pity in her eyes she extended her hands to him—as though it were he who was shortly to be torn from the sphere of love and willing duty.

I smoothed her pillow, and saying I would be within call if I was wanted, I left the room. It was nearly eight o'clock before Benjamin Longmore quitted her side. I had kept dinner back for him, and had it on the table ready when he entered the dining-room.

"Come, sir," I said, "you must be hungry, and must force yourself to eat." This last injunction because he had shaken his head. "You must do what you can to sustain your strength; you will be the better able to sustain hers."

The argument was irresistible; he sat down and ate, but he ate in silence. I stole to Mrs. Longmore's room before his meal was finished, and returning, told him that his wife was sleeping.

"She will not sleep long," I said; "she

generally wakes after she has slumbered an hour or two."

Without waiting for the cloth to be cleared, he began to write letters, and looking up once, said :

"I am excusing myself from business, Miss Felicia, and shall not leave the house this week."

"It will be a comfort to her, sir," I said, "to have you with her."

"Tell me," he said—"you are a wise woman, much wiser than I thought you in the beginning of our acquaintance—do you believe the doctor is right?"

"If I could only believe otherwise, sir," I said, and was going on, when he interrupted me.

"That is enough. No one holds out a ray of hope."

He sat in gloomy silence, biting his lip nervously, and did not speak till we heard a soft knock at the street-door.

"That is Philip Ollier," he said. "For the last month he has been careful to knock very quietly, so that my dear wife should not be disturbed by a loud or abrupt sound. He, you, and all others have seen what I have been blind to. And yet—and yet—who loves her as I love her?"

Some time afterwards, in recalling these natural words, I thought of what he said to me when we first met, that his wife's eyes were in her heart, and his in his head. In matters of pure sympathy there lies all the difference.

He was in his passion of grief when Philip Ollier came in. He cast but one glance upon Benjamin Longmore, and he knew all.

"Ben, Ben!" he said, with his arms across his friend's shoulders.

"The worst has not happened, Phil," sobbed Benjamin Longmore, "but it will soon. We have not long to wait."

My duties took me from the room, and I was glad that my master had a sympathetic soul by his side to comfort and sustain him.

At ten o'clock that night Mrs. Longmore awoke; I was sitting by her bed. There was a strange look in her eyes, which presently, however, recovered their clear light.

#### CHAPTER VI.

THE CHILDREN CAME TOWARDS HER, TOUCHED HER DRESS, AND GAZED UP AT HER AS THEY WOULD HAVE GAZED UP AT AN ANGEL.

"YOU have been sitting here for some time," she said.

"Yes," I said.

"I must tell you of a fancy I have had," she said; but she broke off by asking whether Gracie was sleeping well and quietly. To more completely assure her I went to the child's room, and came back and told her that Grace was fast asleep.

"And my husband?" she asked.

"He is downstairs; Mr. Ollier is with him."

"Dear Philip Ollier! With two such friends as you and that good man always with him, what harm can befall?"

And yet that she had some hidden cause for apprehension in the future was evident to me; but I did not trouble her by enquiring into it, knowing that if she required sympathy and advice in any matter she wished to broach, she would seek them from me.

"About my fancy," she said. "Perhaps it is because the doctor has confirmed what I have known for some time, that I was visited by it. Indeed, before I went to sleep—how long ago, Miss Felicia?"

"Two hours. It is now ten o'clock."

"When I closed my eyes, and felt that sleep would soon hold me fast in its arms, I thought, 'Shall I wake up again in this world? Shall I see the dear ones who fill my heart? Shall I feel their kisses again on my lips?' I would have struggled against the disposition for sleep, but I felt that it would be wrong to do so, and presently I became unconscious. I awoke many minutes ago, but did not dare to open my eyes; I lay quite still, thinking whether I was alive or dead. I knew that some form was near me, and I thought it might be the form of an angel, and not a human being. Should I repine, or be glad, if I found that I had left my home, and my husband and child? Upon this came other thoughts. Is there grief, is there sorrow in the future state, or is it all light, and joy, and happiness? Then I breathed the prayer, 'Heaven's will be done.' I opened my eyes, and saw you sitting here, and I was glad. Give me your hand, Miss Felicia—ah, that is the clasp of a friend. Yes, I was truly glad. Eternity is long, and my time here is so short. To-day is Tuesday."

"Yes."

"Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday—the day of rest! I shall live till then, dear Felicia. The days are still long; and I think we shall have bright weather all the week."

Step downstairs, and ask Philip Ollier if he can let Edward come here every day this week. It will be a holiday for the dear lad, for he must not know; nor must Gracie. Be careful of that. I want to see Gracie and Edward together as much as possible."

I went down to the friends, and gave Mrs. Longmore's message, and Philip Ollier said his boy should come. Afterwards he asked whether, and when, Mrs. Longmore could see him.

"I will let you know to-morrow," I said.

The friends gave a simultaneous sigh of relief, and their faces momentarily brightened. They gathered from my words that there was no immediate danger, and that Mrs. Longmore would live over the morrow. Immediately afterwards, Philip Ollier took his departure; he would not keep Benjamin Longmore from his wife.

On the following morning Edward Ollier came, and the two children sat in Mrs. Longmore's room, playing and talking quietly. Then, and always, there was nothing boisterous in their intercourse. Mrs. Longmore lay back, contemplating them happily. When they were away at their dinner, she told me that at length she had had her wish. She had dreamt of Gracie's future.

"I saw her, a bright and beautiful woman—and Edward was with her. It will be, dear Felicia; it is a message from Heaven."

It is impossible for me to say whether the children had any premonition of what was soon to happen; but it is certain from their tender, and more than usually gentle bearing towards Mrs. Longmore, that they were dominated by an unaccustomed influence. They would stand by her bedside for a long time together without uttering a word, unless Mrs. Longmore spoke to them and asked questions, Gracie fondling her mother's hand or stroking her hair, and Edward very solemn and still, with his eyes on her face. Perhaps they were impressed by the quietude of the servants, who loved their mistress, or by our own demeanour, or by the frequent visits of the doctor. Each day they went into the garden, and, coming back, laid some simple flowers on her pillow. How she treasured these love-offerings! Each time the fresh flowers were brought in she gave me yesterday's tribute, and asked me to put them in her coffin.

"What are you thinking of, Ned?" she

asked once, as the lad was gazing solemnly on her.

"Of my mamma," he answered.

"My poor boy!" she murmured, drawing him to her breast.

When I took him away I saw that he had been shedding tears; but he said nothing. He was five years older than Grace, and already showed indications of strength of character, which augured well for the future. The children worshipped each other; I can find no other term to express the affection which existed between them.

So the week passed away, until Saturday arrived. To-morrow would be Sunday—the day of rest!

It was wonderful that there appeared to be no diminution of Mrs. Longmore's strength, no dimming of her intellectual powers. But the doctor had warned me.

"You will see a change to-morrow," he said.

With what vividness are the solemn events of that week ever present to me! The memory of those days will be with me to my last hour. Every time I saw Mrs. Longmore's eyes open after a slumber, there was for a moment a questioning look in them; then she would smile at me, and gently nod her head. Two or three times a day, and always when night was coming on, Benjamin Longmore would take my place by her side; and I used to think that nothing that could occur in his future life would efface the lessons he must have learned in those solemn hours. To me Mrs. Longmore was, and is, a saint in her qualities of patience, faith, and mercy.

There is something I have not mentioned. Not alone in her house were her sweet qualities displayed. She possessed in her own right a small income. It was a legacy left to her by her father, and its exact amount was fifty-two pounds—that is, one pound a week. Benjamin Longmore was the manager of a tea business in the City, and his salary was six hundred pounds per annum. Upon this the household was maintained in fair comfort; but nothing was put by for a rainy day, as the saying is, Benjamin Longmore being by no means economically inclined. His firm conviction that he would at some time become very wealthy may have been the cause of this disregard for the future. Anyway, the fact remained that rent, servants, clothing, and the maintenance of the house, swallowed up every shilling of his salary; and he was satisfied that it should be

so. His wife's income of fifty-two pounds he would not touch, and with his full concurrence and consent, she disposed of it thus: Half of it was dispensed in charities, the other half was put by for Grace, to accumulate till she was twenty-one years of age. Then it was to be hers absolutely. Of the investment of this twenty-six pounds a year, Benjamin Longmore took charge, and, as he had a shrewd head for business, it was invested well. There remained for Mrs. Longmore's charities ten shillings a week.

Until she was unable to leave the house, except in a carriage, Mrs. Longmore dispensed her charities herself, visiting her pensioners, and making herself acquainted with their special wants; but from the time that she was unable to go out, these charitable offices were delegated to me, and I need not say that I undertook them gladly. It was then I discovered that she, too, was wise in her way, and that the money she gave was given with discrimination. And yet, dare I, who am no political economist, say as much? In charity I have but one thought, and Mrs. Longmore and I were alike in the view we took. Did the persons she relieved require relief? There was no question of deserving. Here was a family that required food, that were destitute of clothing, that had no boots fit to wade through deep snow. Here was a mother with a young baby, and want was staring them in the face—want with its gaunt and wolfish eyes. The question whether the family was deserving or no did not occur to Mrs. Longmore, and did not occur to me. True, the father was a lazy scoundrel, who would not work, who ill-treated his wife and children; but the family were starving. True, the mother with the young baby had no husband; but the wolf was at the door. Here was the argument that, in our belief, with mercifully resistless weight crushed down all others. Human beings were craving for food, hunger was tearing at their vitals. Came the angel, my dear, dear mistress and friend, to the despairing ones, and bought them bread and clothing, and did not leave them till the terror and the horror were gone, at least for a little while. How, then, in the face of so-called charity that waits, and temporises, and discusses, and measures—how can I say that either my dear mistress or I was wise in doing as we did? I see the warning finger shaken at me, I hear the carefully considered words addressed to me, that I am ministering to beggary,

fostering it, encouraging it, and that I am an enemy to the well-being of society. How shall I answer—what shall I plead in extenuation? That while we wait, the inducement to crime is being engendered in the souls of those whose bodies require to-day what may possibly be given to-morrow, or the day after, when it is too late? A weak argument, I may be told. Perhaps so, but it is the strongest I can find, and I stand to it. As my honoured mistress did, God in heaven—where her pure spirit now is—bless her for it.

It properly belongs to the story I am telling to relate the incidents of one memorable day.

When the weakness was coming upon her, and Mrs. Longmore felt—she confessed as much to me subsequently—that the time was approaching when she would have to hand over to a deputy the merciful offices which she was performing herself, she asked me for the first time to accompany her on her rounds. We rode in an omnibus to the poorest part of the City, down East End way, and there my mistress and I went into a very wretched room—a room horrible with gloom and misery. But as she stood in it in her silver-grey dress, her sweet and pitiful eyes gazing around the fetid walls and on the pinched faces of hungry children, I thought of the Son of God, and I recognised in her the true type of Christianity. I could have knelt at her feet and worshipped her, and in my heart of hearts I blessed and revered her. Ah, me! The children came towards her, touched her dress, and gazed up at her as they would have gazed up at an angel. She knelt and said she had brought something nice for them, and opened the baskets we carried, and there was food which we had bought on the road. They laughed and clapped their hands, and the mother trembled and cried; and we waited while they ate, my sainted mistress talking cheerfully all the time, and I, with my poor efforts, striving to aid her. My heart overflows my eyes as I recall the incidents of that day. Pardon me awhile; I must lay aside my pen.

#### CHAPTER VII.

"I HAVE READ OF WOMEN LIKE YOU,  
BUT HAVE NEVER BEFORE MET WITH  
ONE."

So the poor children were satisfied, and what remained of the food was given to

the mother for to-morrow. Then my dear mistress called for cold water, and washed the hands and faces of the children, and tidied their clothes, having brought with her needles, thread, and buttons, and soap, and some towels which she could spare from her store at home.

"Now, children," she said, "mother will read you the beginning of a nice story before you go to bed."

The book she gave the mother was not a religious book, but a simple and amusing tale, with a good moral hidden in its plot. I remember that on this occasion it was an old book of Edward Ollier's, which his father had given him on a birthday. My dear mistress was an assiduous beggar of clothes and books which had served their day, and apportioned them with her own hands to those who most needed them. She was very fond of begging from her friends such tales of adventure as she approved of, and she would spend hours in fastening loose leaves and mending broken bindings. But this is wandering a little from the special events of this memorable day.

Mrs. Longmore's Christian task being finished, she shook hands with the mother and children, and promising to come again, stood for a moment smiling and nodding brightly at them.

What had come over them? What had come over the place? It was the same place; they were the same children; but all was changed. Their faces were no longer sullen and pinched; there was a light in their eyes, there was gratitude in their hearts; and the room was transformed from an abode of gloom to an abode of hope. Mrs. Longmore nodded and smiled once more, and went away, leaving sunshine behind her.

"Miss Felicia," she said, in a blithe voice, when we were in the streets, "that has done me good. I feel strong enough to walk a long way. We will ride to Regent Street, and walk home through the Park."

There was music in her voice, and the motions of her limbs were like those of a young maid in the full flush of health. At the end of Regent Street we alighted and commenced our walk.

The day was cold, but the air was dry, and there was a bright light in the sky. When we arrived at the Park, we sat on a bench and watched the children feeding the ducks. I did not observe, until he rose and strolled slowly away, that a man,

holding a little girl by the hand, was sitting on the same bench upon which we were resting. Mrs. Longmore had seen him, and now, as he strolled aimlessly towards the water, her eyes followed him. This drew my attention more particularly to him and the child, and I observed that they seemed to be both respectably dressed; but a closer observance confirmed an impression I had formed that this appearance of respectability was due to the care that had been bestowed upon their clothes, which were skilfully mended and patched. Their boots were well worn, but they had been blackened; their hands and faces were clean, and their hair properly combed and brushed.

"Look at that man's face, Miss Felicia," said Mrs. Longmore.

I did so. Not only the face, but the varying expressions upon it, were such as to compel attention. His features were strongly marked, and there was a look of pain in his fine eyes. This look changed into one of yearning as he stopped and watched the children throwing food to the ducks. Two children, comfortably dressed and accompanied by their nurse, were taking buns from a full bag and throwing them in large pieces upon the water. His eyes wandered from the ducks and the buns to the little girl whose hand he held tight in his own.

"He is in trouble," said Mrs. Longmore, and she walked towards him; I followed her, and stood near enough to hear what passed.

Mrs. Longmore stooped and patted the cheek of the child.

"May I ask your name, my dear?" she said.

The child nestled closer to her father, and raised her eyes shyly, but could not muster courage to reply.

"Her name is Mary," said the man, and casting a glance upon Mrs. Longmore, walked onwards a few paces.

Mrs. Longmore lingered a moment at this rebuff, and then walked softly after them.

"I beg you to pardon me if I am in error," she said, in the gentle voice which went straight to the heart of all who heard it, "but your child—and you, also, if you will forgive me for saying so—seems as if she wanted a friend. My name is Longmore; this is my friend, Miss Felicia. I have a little girl of my own, just the age of your child, and I was attracted by her sweet face."

"And by mine, may I ask," said the man, speaking respectfully but firmly, "which is not sweet?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Longmore, frankly, "and by yours."

"Can you read what is written on it?" he asked, his eyes gazing into hers.

"Not clearly," said Mrs. Longmore; "but something moved me to address you. I can say nothing in excuse of the liberty I have taken."

"It isn't much of a liberty," said the man, pondering over her words, and still gazing steadily at her, "and no excuse is required. Friendly voices are not so common that a man should shut his ears to them. Do I look like a beggar, madam?"

"Indeed, indeed you do not," said Mrs. Longmore, earnestly.

"And yet you, a perfect stranger to me—hold hard a bit, though. Perhaps you know me."

"I do not. I never saw you before."

"It is strange, and unusual—very unusual. I was about to say that, although you do not take me for a beggar, you speak to me in a manner which has a sympathetic touch in it. I thank you in my little Mary's name."

His speech was that of a man who had received a good education, and I was attracted by it and by his bearing.

"How old is Mary?"

"Four."

"That is about the age of my little girl. Her name is Grace."

"Plainly, madam, why are you speaking to me?"

"Have I not told you? Because you both seem to need a friend."

"And if we did, would you be that friend?"

"If it lies in my power to be."

"There is a singular magnetism in you," said the man, "and though I am believed to have a strong character of my own, it has a kind of power over me. I have a respect for strength of character in man or woman. Perhaps that doesn't please you; you would rather I said in gentleman or lady."

"No; I think your expression is proper."

"Would you mind my thinking a bit, madam?"

"Not at all; but do not leave me without giving me the opportunity I desire."

"Of proving yourself a friend?"

"Yes, of proving myself a friend."

"It is curious," he said.

He was about to move away with his child when he found himself in a difficulty. He still held one of Mary's hands, but Mrs. Longmore held the other, and the child did not seem inclined to leave my mistress. He hesitated, then dropped Mary's hand, and stepped aside. I saw that a struggle was going on within him; two or three times he turned his thoughtful face to Mrs. Longmore and his little girl, and contemplated them while he was mentally debating.

Presently he came to some sort of conclusion.

"It would be folly," he said, "perhaps worse than folly, to throw aside the helping hand when it is held out to me. It would be a bad kind of pride in a man in my position, with a child who claims support from him. For her sake, then, if not for my own."

Here I ventured to say a word. I saw that my dear mistress was tired, and I asked him if he would mind sitting down with her, telling him that she was not strong. This turned the current of his thoughts, and afforded him an opportunity, of which he instantly availed himself, to show some sympathy for her in return for the sympathy she had shown for him.

We walked to the bench we had left and sat down, and Mrs. Longmore took Mary on her lap. Without letting the child see or hear her, she motioned with her head to the man, and asked him in a whisper if she had a mother.

"No," he answered, in a voice as quiet as hers.

Mrs. Longmore drew the child closer to her breast, and the man's lips trembled a little.

"Mary," he said, "go and look at the ducks and the water."

Evidently accustomed to obey him, the child lifted herself from Mrs. Longmore's lap, and went towards the water, where she stood gazing wistfully at the fun that was going on there.

"A man doesn't want his child to hear everything he says," the man said. "Young as Mary is, she might remember with pain and humiliation a painful and humiliating confession. My name is Macmillan, John Macmillan, and I am a working carpenter. I was not brought up to the trade; my father was a shopkeeper in rather a good way, and he intended that I should be a shopkeeper after him. During an indolent boyhood—the indolence was not of my choice; I was not apprenticed to any trade

—I took a liking to fancy carpentering, and buying books and tools with my pocket-money, made myself rather proficient. Our house was filled with all sorts of nicknacks of my manufacturing, and I was rather vain and proud of my work. My father dying, I discovered that his affairs were in confusion. What he left behind him barely paid his debts. Everything had to be given up to his creditors—business, stock, and our home. That being done, there was I aground with an old mother to support, and a young sweetheart I wanted to marry. My fancy carpentering served me in good stead. I obtained employment, and managed to get a living, and then I married. My poor mother did not trouble us long; a year after my marriage I followed her to the grave. During her last days she had one vain wish; I am doing no wrong to her memory to call it vain. I am a man of strong opinions, and I never hesitate to express them. She wished for a fine funeral, and she made me promise to give her one. A promise given to a dying mother is sacred, and I kept mine without undergoing any change in the opinion I held upon the matter—which is, that these expensive funerals, in poor or rich, are a woeful mistake. Perhaps, one day, some part of the money wasted upon these exhibitions will be devoted to better purposes—to helping the poor, for instance. However, I was much commended for the fine show I gave; I gained the praise of my neighbours, and lost my money, which I could ill afford to lose. To tell the truth, I got into debt a bit through the funeral. 'Never mind,' said I, 'it is only working a little harder for a few months.' That was easily said, but not so easily done. Work got slack, and I worked short hours instead of long. Then came a strike, and I was thrown out for sixteen weeks. That made things worse, and though I did not get deeper in debt I could not pay the money I owed. When the strike was over I could get work only for three or four days a week, and this I put down to my opinions. There was no help for it, and I did my best, but you will see that it was a hard struggle. I had a good wife, but she was delicate; and it was through her painful efforts to assist me—doing things when I was at work, or seeking it, which I had no notion of—that she took to her bed. She did not leave it; after four months of suffering she was carried to the churchyard. There was no fine funeral this time, and there would

have been none even if I could have afforded it, for my wife and I were of one mind on this question. She left me a child, my little Mary there, and I put my shoulder to the wheel more vigorously than ever, doing not only fine carpentering when it fell in my way, but any other thing in the way of making up tradesmen's books, and that like, that I could pick up. Bad as things were, they grew worse. It is a man's duty, to the last effort there is in him, to give his child food, and to bring her up respectably, and I did not throw away the least chance of earning a few shillings or a few pence. No merit to me. I love work, and if I were a rich man, and could not get it without paying for it, I would pay for it cheerfully, and go begging for it with my pockets full, as I am now begging for it with my pockets empty. I owe it to myself to say that I paid my creditors in the end; it was not because they threatened me with extreme measures, but because what a man owes must be paid, though he stand bare in the face of the world. How did I pay them, you may ask. Well, there was a watch my father gave me which I clung to, upon my word, as though it was alive. That went. There was my wife's wedding-ring and a gold keeper. They went. There were a few books I treasured. They went. A few other things as well, and I got a clear quittance, and could look people in the face. I did not want to quite lose my self-respect. I kept rubbing on, and never lost hold of the anchor of hope." He turned his face from us and said: "But it is slipping from me now."

Mrs. Longmore laid her hand upon his arm, and he said, simply:

"Thank you. I am coming to the end of my story. The worst feature in it is that I could not obtain regular employment, and no man tried harder than I did; as hard, no doubt, for there are hundreds of others in the same plight as myself. Then came something harder than all. Being out of work, with no means to buy bread, I parted with my tools one by one. For a week or so we lived upon steel; you don't get much for tools, you know. And now, when I had the chance of work, I could not take it because my tools were gone. We have had some trying days lately, my Mary and I, and you may wonder what brought me to this pleasure ground. Well, I have been endeavouring since six o'clock this morning to get a job—

anything, I did not care much what it was, so that I might give my child a breakfast. She has asked for it—natural, is it not? Whom else should she ask? 'Wait a little, child,' I said to her, 'it is quite early yet.' Then a fancy seized her of coming into a park. I was in this neighbourhood, trying my last chance with a builder, with the usual result, and I said, 'Come along, Mary, we'll go into the Park and look at the ducks.' Not much of a meal that. You saw me, I dare say, envying those youngsters feeding the ducks with buns—see, they are shaking the last crumbs from the bag. Well, I had it in my mind to ask them to give Mary a bun instead of the ducks, but though my hungry child was holding my hand I could not screw up my courage. A father should have more nerve than that, should he not? So I stood there, wondering how it was going to end, when you came and spoke to me. My story is told. Pray forgive me for wearying you."

"You have not wearied me, friend," said Mrs. Longmore. "You have parted with your tools. Could you get work if you had them?"

He looked at her sternly.

"Must I make myself a beggar?"

"No," she replied, firmly; "you are a man, and you must perform a man's duty. Would not you, in my position, do to another like yourself as I beg you to allow me to do to you?"

"I might."

"You would. I am not, as you are, strong-minded. Answer me honestly—as honestly as you have already spoken."

"Oh, you believe my story?"

"You have told me the truth, and I am grateful to you."

Though I saw he was much shaken—as who in his place would not have been?—so proud and rebellious was he that he still wavered.

"London," he said, slowly, "can boast of a thousand professional beggars, who could tell you a much more plausible tale than I have related."

"I desire you to answer me," said Mrs. Longmore, and in all my experience I had never heard her speak with so much determination. "Could you get work if you had your tools?"

"It is as good as promised to me."

"How much will they cost to get?"

He put his fingers in his waistcoat pocket, and hastily withdrew them with an angry shake of his head. The pawn-

tickets were in that pocket, and to exhibit them was to exhibit what he looked upon as a degradation.

"I can tell you the exact sum," he said. "It is within one penny of eighteen shillings."

"Do me the pleasure of borrowing this from me. I can well spare it, and more."

She put two sovereigns into his hand, which was not extended to receive them. The action was so quietly done, and her manner was so unostentatious, that no person, observing them, would have dreamt that money had passed from one to the other. She had extracted the gold from her purse without either of us being aware of it. It did not escape my attention that when he felt the money in his hand he glanced around with a kind of shame in his face, to assure himself that there was no chance witness of what had been done.

There was a brief silence. Then the man said :

"No, I will not borrow so much. One will be sufficient."

"But there is to-day to provide for," urged Mrs. Longmore.

"One will be sufficient," he repeated.

Without further remonstrance she took back the sovereign.

"I will not thank you," he said. "I cannot. It is impossible that you have saved me. I have read of women like you, but have never before met with one. The sovereign will be paid back to you. Kindly give me your address."

Another woman would have refused; my mistress at once handed him her card. At that moment his little daughter looked over her shoulder at him.

"Do not offer anything to my child," he said to my mistress.

"I will not," she answered.

"Mary," he called, and the child came to us, "look at this lady. I want you to remember her face, as I shall, to my dying day. Do you think you will know her again when you see her?"

"Oh, yes, father."

"Say 'God bless you.'"

"God bless you," said the child, raising her head.

"And you, my dear," said my mistress, kissing the little girl.

Then, holding out her hand to the man, she beckoned to me, and we left them.

Thus ended this memorable day, and the seed that was sown bore flower and fruit.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## A DREAM WITHIN A DREAM.

IT was Sunday, and I noted the change foretold by the doctor. At intervals in the early morning my dear mistress became so still and quiet that more than once I inclined my ear to her heart to convince myself that it had not ceased to beat. Whenever I did this she opened her eyes and smiled sweetly on me. Once she said :

"I am still with you, Felicia."

Towards noon she brightened up a little, and it was then that she asked that Philip Ollier should come to her. She had appointed this day on which to see him and bid him farewell. He and his son were both in the house.

"And let Ned come, too," she said.

They came softly into the room, and stood by her bed.

"Ned, my dear lad," she said, "stoop and kiss me. I am hardly strong enough to raise myself."

Ned lowered his head, and they kissed each other.

"You and Gracie are great friends," she said.

"Yes; I am very fond of Gracie." He showed in his solemn face a sense of what was impending, and he spoke in a whisper.

"Always be, Ned, my dear."

"I will be, always."

"With you and Gracie, my dear, this is the playtime of life. By-and-by you will be a man, and she a woman. It is then I want you to be true to her."

"I shall never be anything else."

"To think of you being a man, a great tall man! And my Gracie a beautiful woman! It is almost too wonderful to believe. Then you will have to work, Ned."

"I am going to."

"Whatever you do, Ned, never mind how high it is or how low, never lose sight of two things—your faith and trust in God, and the duty you have to perform. They will help to make you happy."

"I will do as you say."

There must have been a thought in his mind that the promise required some sort of binding action, for he held up his right hand as he spoke the last words.

"I could not speak to Gracie, my dear, as I am speaking to you; she would not understand. But you do, do you not, Ned, when I say that a faithful friendship is one of the most beautiful things in life?"

"I think I understand; and I will be Gracie's faithful friend."

"Kiss me again, dear child, and then I wish to speak to your good father alone."

She held him in her embrace for a little while, and then his father raised him from the bed and led him softly to the door, whispering to him that he was not to leave the house, but wait below. Ned's eyes were overflowing, but he did not allow the least sound to escape him.

"He is a dear, good lad," said my dear mistress to Philip Ollier, when the lad was gone, "and has a wonderful sense of things. He will be a great comfort to you."

"I know he will be, dear Mrs. Longmore," said Philip Ollier. "I look forward to his future without fear."

"Felicia, leave me and Mr. Ollier alone for a few minutes."

I do not know what passed between them, but when Philip Ollier came out there was in his eyes the look of a man who had been praying.

"Go in to her," he said, as he brushed past me.

"Felicia," said my mistress, "I want my child."

Very soon Grace was lying by her mother's side. Then came the bitter trial, the terrible consciousness that her darling was so soon to be deprived of her watchful love. I witnessed the silent struggle that was being waged in my dear mistress's heart. She conquered, and I saw on her lips, but did not hear the words, for, indeed, they were not spoken, "God's will be done." With what exquisite tenderness did she from that moment devote herself to make this last solemn hour an hour of bright memories for Grace. She tried to sing the child's favourite song, and breaking down, said :

"We will sing it together one day in heaven, darling."

"Oh, yes, mamma," said Grace.

She asked Grace to sing her to sleep, and the little one began; but at this time of day it was usual for Grace herself to sleep, and before her song was finished the broken words hung upon her lips, and there was a holy silence in the room, the slumbering child, with her lovely lips parted, face to face with her dying mother.

"My darling, my darling!" murmured my mistress, "I will watch over you and guard you. Dear Lord in heaven, keep her heart pure, make her life happy and blameless!"

So they lay for half an hour, and then my mistress whispered to me to take her away. I waited till the last, last kisses were given, and carried Grace to her own little cot, where I left her asleep. When I returned, Benjamin Longmore was with his wife, holding her hand.

"There is something I have to say, my dear," said my mistress, "and it must be said now, and in Miss Felicia's presence. It is a wish I have. If you will grant it you will bring a blessing upon me, upon yourself, upon our darling child."

"Whatever you say shall be done," said Benjamin Longmore.

"During my illness my mind has been filled with thought of you and Grace, of your future, of hers. You are absent from the house the greater part of the day. I cannot bear to think that our darling will be left to the care of strangers."

"That she shall not be." He turned to me with sudden trouble. "Miss Felicia, you are not going to leave us?"

"No," I replied, "I have no such thought, no such wish."

"You anticipate me, dear," said my mistress. "My most earnest desire is that Miss Felicia shall have the care of our darling till she is a woman and can judge for herself. Miss Felicia has been with us now a long time, and I have grown to love her. I want her to remain with you and Grace always; I want her, as far as she can do so, to take my place with our child. It shall be so, shall it not?"

"It shall be so," said Benjamin Longmore. "I give you my sacred promise that my home shall be hers as long as she chooses to have it so, and that no one but she shall have charge of our dear Gracie."

"My dear master and mistress," I said, "if you had asked me the one wish in my heart, it is this. I accept the sacred duty, and devote my life to its performance. As I deal by your dear child, so may I be dealt with."

Mrs. Longmore feebly stretched out her hand to me, and I kissed it reverently, and I kissed the hand which Benjamin Longmore extended to me.

"How good you are to me!" Mrs. Longmore said to her husband. "How good you have ever been! Miss Felicia will take upon herself also the disposal of the little I have been able to give away in charity. She will dispose of it as I should have done. When Gracie is a little older, I should wish her to accompany Miss Felicia sometimes, to learn the lessons

which I should have taught her had it pleased God to spare me."

"Everything shall be done as you desire," said Benjamin Longmore.

"I think I will sleep a little. Do not leave me. Miss Felicia will want a little money; she will understand soon what I mean, and will tell you. You will allow her to take ten pounds from Gracie's portion this year."

"Yes, my dear wife—my poor darling!"

He checked the outburst of grief, and she took his hand and laid her cheek upon it. I stole from the room.

It was evening when Benjamin Longmore, leaning over the balustrade, softly called my name. In the meantime the doctor had visited us, and would not disturb Mrs. Longmore's slumber. He told me that the end was coming fast. I crept upstairs, and Benjamin Longmore took my hand, and whispering that he was afraid, led me into the room. Mrs. Longmore lay in the position in which I left her. She had not moved, except to release her husband's hand. Placid and beautiful was her face; there was no pain, no suffering in it; it symbolised peace and resignation.

"She lives still," I said.

"Will she pass away like that?" he asked. "What did the doctor say?"

"He bade us prepare. Hush!"

Mrs. Longmore stirred; her eyelids quivered, but she did not open her eyes; there was a movement of her lips. Benjamin Longmore laid his face close to hers.

"My dear husband!"

"I am here, darling."

"And Felicia?"

"Yes, my dear mistress."

"You have not kissed me, Felicia."

I put my lips to hers.

"When I was a child my mother, who is waiting to receive me"—her voice was a little stronger, but her words came at intervals—"told me that Felicia means happiness. I never thought of it again, till just now in a dream I saw my mother, and she said to me, 'Felicia—happiness!' 'Yes, mother,' I answered, 'Felicia takes my place with our darling Gracie.' 'She will bring happiness to her,' my mother said. 'Come, my child.' And she opened her arms to me, and in my sleep I fell asleep in her embrace. A dream within a dream. Dear husband, put your arms about me. Let me hear your voice."

"Darling!"

"Oh, my dear, you must not grieve for me. Think of me as I soon shall be, in heaven waiting for you, as my mother is waiting for me; stretching out my arms for you, as hers are stretching out for me. It will be but a little while. Time is a breath. Remember, my dear husband, Felicia is to be always with our dear child."

"She shall be, always."

"Is it dark or light, dear?"

"Night is coming on," murmured Benjamin Longmore, in a voice of anguish.

"No, dear, no; morning is coming. I feel, if I cannot see, the glow of sunrise. My blessing upon all in this house!"

Her head swayed gently to and fro, her hands moved slowly this way and that upon the counterpane. Gradually these motions ceased till all was still.

Thus did my beloved mistress pass away, and her face was as the face of an angel.

#### CHAPTER IX.

##### THE ANGEL LADY.

I REMEMBER that it was eight o'clock when I opened her desk and took out the envelope which she had addressed to me a few weeks before. I should not have been in such haste had I not thought there might be some instructions in her writing which needed early attention. This what I found written on a sheet of paper upon which my name was again inscribed:

"DEAR FELICIA,—Some words spoken by the poor man we met in the Park on the last day I was able to walk out made a deep impression upon me, and I have pondered over them with a hope and a desire to give, in some small way, practical effect to them. You will remember the man—he told us his name was Macmillan. The words, my dear Felicia, were: 'These expensive funerals, in poor or rich, are a woeful mistake. Perhaps one day some part of the money wasted upon these exhibitions will be devoted to better purposes, to helping the poor, for instance.' There is a beautiful lesson in his remarks, Felicia, and I have an earnest desire to show that it was not wasted upon me.

"I have not long to live; let my death bring comfort and hope to a few poor people. I shall ask my dear husband to allow ten pounds of my darling Gracie's

money to be devoted to this purpose. He will consent; and I am writing to you now partly to provide for a contingency that may occur, for our lives are not in our own hands. I may die suddenly, without warning, although it is my belief that I shall live till September. I would speak to my dear husband at once about my desire, but I do not wish to inflict unnecessary pain upon him; it is now June, and there are three months before September is here. To speak to him so long before I believe I shall be called would fill his heart with sorrow and pain for three long months.

"Dear Felicia, you will have ten pounds of my darling Gracie's money, and perhaps, if you show these lines to my dear husband, he will gratify me by spending as little as possible upon my funeral, which I should like to be very simple, and will give you the money that is saved, to add to our child's ten pounds. I want this money given to the poor people you know or may hear of, who are in want; and then I shall feel that my death has brought comfort to some few poor homes. There is another wish I have. When you have decided how to bestow the money, take dear Gracie with you, and let her give it with her own pretty hands. Young as she is, it may furnish her with a sweet memory; and what task can there be more pleasant than to provide childhood with memories that may live in the mind with good effect in the future? On a separate page I have written the names of those who appear to me most deserving—but you will be the best judge of that, and I trust entirely to your selection of those to whom the money is given.

"That is all I have to say, dear Felicia, except to thank you from my heart for all the love and kindness you have shown for me and my darling child. That you will be by her side to guide and counsel her as she grows to womanhood is my fervent hope. Good-bye, my dear.—Your loving friend,

"ALICE LONGMORE."

I examined the list of names she had prepared; they were selected with great care and wisdom, and I resolved that I would carry out the wishes of my sainted mistress to the letter.

Whether rightly or wrongly, I decided to show this paper at once to my master; and I went down to him. Edward Ollier had been sent home to bed, and Philip Ollier was with his friend. Upon the table was a Bible, from which Philip

Ollier had been reading. Benjamin Longmore's head was resting on his hand, and there was silence in the room when I entered.

I explained the reason of my intrusion, and gave the paper to my master. He looked at it, but the tears ran down his face when he saw his wife's handwriting.

"Read it, Phil," he said.

Philip Ollier read the sacred words in a hushed tone, his emotion causing him to pause many times during the perusal.

"Oh, my angel wife!" sobbed Benjamin Longmore, as his friend put down the paper.

"Such bereavements may be a gain, Ben," said Philip Ollier, solemnly.

"Do not say so," cried Benjamin Longmore. "You are cruel — cruel! Forgive me, Phil; I do not know what I am saying." When he was somewhat calmer he turned to me. "Her last wishes shall be obeyed, Miss Felicia."

"It is right, my dear master," I said.

"Yes," said Philip Ollier, "it is right."

I think it was about half an hour afterwards that one of the servants came to me, and said that a man had called at the house, and wished to see me.

"Did he give his name," I asked, "and say what he wanted?"

"No," replied the maid. "He asked first for Mrs. Longmore, and when I told him why he could not see her he seemed quite staggered and overpowered. Then he asked to see you."

"By name?" I enquired.

"He asked if Mrs. Longmore's lady friend was here, and he called you by your name, Miss Felicia. When I said you were in the house, he told me to come to you with his message."

"Go and ask him what he wants," I said.

The maid went, and returned with an envelope upon which was written in pencil the name of John Macmillan. It was the man to whom my dear mistress had given a sovereign in the Park.

A word upon this subject. From the day my dear mistress had befriended him we had not seen or heard from him. I had often thought of his promise that the sovereign should be paid back, and I confess that I was disappointed at his silence. My dear mistress never spoke of him, and I did not introduce his name into our conversations, keeping my thoughts

to myself, which, I frankly own, were not complimentary to him.

"There is no one in the dining-room?" I said to the maid.

"No, miss."

"Take him there, and say I will come to him."

Presently I joined him there. He stood with his cap in his hand, and there was a look of sorrow on his face. He was dressed exactly as we had seen him in the Park — the same clothes, more worn, of course, but distinguished by that remarkable tidiness and cleanliness which had attracted us on the occasion of our first meeting with him.

"I have come too late," he said, in a tone of true sympathy.

I nodded, and waited for him to continue.

"I should have been here before, but was not able until to-day to pay my debt, so I kept away. She is dead now, and thought me ungrateful."

"It was not possible," I said, "for her to harbour an unkind thought of any one in the world."

"That I can well believe. I will not detain you long. It has taken me all this time to save what she lent to me." He put a sovereign on the table. "I came to-night to pay and thank her."

I gently pushed the sovereign towards him, saying: "It is, as you said, too late," and the moment I spoke the words I felt they were ill-chosen.

"Not too late to pay my debt," he said, doggedly, "but too late to thank her — to tell her that she has been the means of saving me, and of giving me the opportunity to provide food for my child." He pushed the sovereign back. "I should have come a couple of hours ago, but I waited till my child was asleep." I noticed then that he had a paper, containing something in his hand. He opened it, and laid a few flowers on the table. "I took my little girl into the country lanes to-day, knowing I was coming here to-night. She gathered these poor flowers herself, and asked me to take them to the angel lady, for that is how she speaks of the good woman who has gone to her rest. She does not know how true her words are. The angel lady!"

"May I venture to say that she would like you to keep this money to help you on? The flowers you have brought shall be laid on her coffin."

"I should wish them to be laid there,

and I am grateful to you. I was wrong in saying that she might think ill of me for not coming before. She could not, and she does not now—for she knows and sees. Let me tell you what she did for me. She not only enabled me to get a living—and you will not be sorry to learn that, during this past week, my prospects have brightened—but she restored my faith. I was losing hope in Heaven as I had lost hope in my fellow-creatures. Her charity and mercy, no less than the influence of her presence, restored it to me; and the bitter thoughts which stirred me to rebellion have fled, never to return. I will take care, for her sake, whatever befalls, that it shall be as I say. Do you see the blessing that an unselfish act of goodness can confer upon a despairing man? I owe her something infinitely more precious than a mere piece of gold, you will acknowledge. Would that there were more angels on earth resembling her! As for the sovereign, I cannot take it back. Give it to the poor; it may lift another man up, as it lifted me."

I started, the sentiment he uttered was so truly in accordance with the spirit which animated my dear mistress.

"Yes," I said, putting the piece of gold in my purse. "It shall be bestowed as you wish. Perhaps you would like to know that you have been the means of doing good, and that some words you spoke to her have blossomed into flower."

"I have been the means of doing good!" he exclaimed, in wonder.

It was due to him that he should be made acquainted with Mrs. Longmore's last wishes. I recognised in him an exceptional man, and I felt any trust reposed in him would not be misplaced. He had met in my dear mistress an angel of mercy and sweetness, and we met in him a man of sterling worth.

"Remain here a moment," I said.

I went to the room in which the two friends were sitting, and asked Benjamin Longmore to let me have his wife's last testament, saying I would bring it back to him.

"It is yours, Miss Felicia," he said. "I think I could repeat it, word for word."

With the paper in my hand, I returned to Mr. Macmillan, and bade him read it. His eyes moistened and his hands trembled as he perused this sacred message from her who was lying in death's embrace in the room above.

"It is wonderful," he said, "wonderful and beautiful as a page from the Book of God. I am humbly, humbly grateful; but the goodness sprang from her heart, not from mine. Miss Felicia, should I ever be tempted to do wrong, I will think of this. She spoke of her child," he said, after a pause, "a little girl of the same age as my Mary. She called her Grace. How is she?"

"She knows nothing," I said. "She is too young to realise her loss."

"There are inherited virtues. May she grow up as her mother did!"

"Amen!" I said.

I saw that he felt that his visit had reached its proper termination, and yet he lingered.

"Is there anything more you wish to say?" I asked, with the intention of assisting him out of his embarrassment.

"There is a favour," he replied, "I hardly dare to ask; and even if you were willing you might not be able to grant it."

"I cannot say till I know what it is."

"Is there in the house," he said, timidly, "any old portrait of Mrs. Longmore that you could spare? Never mind how old and faded it is; I should regard it as an inestimable obligation."

It happened to be in my power to give him what he desired. In July, in accordance with a wish expressed by my dear mistress, Benjamin Longmore had engaged the services of a photographer, who, making his preparations in the garden, had taken portraits of Gracie and her father, and of Philip and Edward Ollier, singly and in groups, in one of the latter of which I was invited to take a place. My dear mistress was sitting at her window, which faced the garden, watching the operation, and Benjamin Longmore, suddenly looking up at her, whispered a few words to the photographer, who looked up also, and nodded. Benjamin Longmore told me what was in his mind, and I ran indoors to his wife, and rearranged the flowers on the sill so that her face, upon which the light was shining, might be clearly seen. I informed her of her husband's wish, and she smilingly consented. The result was a most charming picture of my dear mistress, from which a number of copies had been struck.

"You shall have a portrait of my dear mistress," I said to Mr. Macmillan, and went up to my room and got it for him.

He gazed at it long and reverently, and wrapping it carefully in paper, put it into his pocket. I accompanied him into the passage which led to the street-door, and I noticed that he cast a look at the stairs. His wistful eyes were not to be resisted.

"Come upstairs," I whispered. "Tread softly."

We stood in the room in which the dear angel was lying, and in which I had lit some candles. Her face was upturned; her hands were folded on the counterpane; she looked like one who had fallen into a sweet sleep. Mr. Macmillan sank upon his knees and kissed the white covering, and just touched with his lips the lovely hands. Then he rose, and bowing his head to me, went softly downstairs, and bidding me good night, left the house.

On the day of the funeral he was in the churchyard with his little child, and when the coffin was lowered he and his daughter dropped some flowers into the grave.

And so my beloved mistress was laid to rest.

#### CHAPTER X.

#### GRANDMAMMA LONGMORE'S PECULIARITIES BECOME MORE MARKED.

In recounting these, the most pathetic experiences in my life, I have said nothing of Grandmamma Longmore, for the reason that she was not with us during my dear mistress's illness. She lived in the country, and being at that time herself unwell, her son enjoined her not to come to London. But two or three days after we had followed the last remains of the dear one to the churchyard, Grandmamma Longmore made her appearance, and took up her residence in the house. She had lived all alone, having lost her husband some years since, and it was natural and proper that she should come to live with the only relatives she had in the world.

I think that Grandmamma Longmore was at first inclined to rebel against the authority with which I was invested, for I had the entire control of the establishment. It was certainly only an impression, for the rebellion, if it existed at all, was not an open one; but I may be pardoned for saying that my impressions are generally correct. Either way, her dislike of my dominion did not last very long; she found herself well cared for and looked after, and her special tastes in all matters

were anticipated by me. This being the case, she probably deemed it best for her own convenience and comfort, to say nothing of the ease it brought her, to acknowledge me as the nominal mistress of the household. Indeed, after a time we became very good friends, and I was particularly careful not to do the least thing that might wound the old lady's dignity. Grace was solely in my charge, and as I had received a sound education I was well fitted to look after hers.

I must not omit to mention that a scrupulous account was kept of the small expense of my dear mistress's funeral, and of what it would have cost had it not been for her last wishes. This account was made out by Phillip Ollier, who took upon himself all the arrangements for the funeral, and on the day after the sad ceremony, he handed to me the sum of twenty-six pounds. This, with the ten pounds I received from Grace's money, and the sovereign Mr. Macmillan had paid me, made thirty-seven pounds, which enabled me to do a great deal of good. There is no reason why I should enter into the details of this expenditure. Suffice it to say that it was well bestowed, and that with a portion of it I assisted a poor and deserving family to emigrate to Australia. In after years I was surprised and gratified to receive from the head of this poor family various small drafts amounting in all to three times the sum he had received from me, or rather from Grace, for it was her little hands that gave the money away. He had worked and prospered; from the day he set foot upon Australian shores he and his family had never known want, and he is now a well-to-do man, master of his own house and land. It is a great pleasure to know that my dear mistress's last wishes bore such good fruit, and if her example is followed by others, this simple story will not have been written in vain.

For some months after my dear mistress was taken from us, there was much sadness in Benjamin Longmore's house, but gradually cheerfulness crept in and took firm hold, and for many years the home was very happy. The disquieting thoughts I had been troubled with because of Benjamin Longmore's idea of the value of money were lulled and forgotten. It will presently be my duty to record how in after years they sprang into fierce life, and brought unhappiness in their train. Meanwhile, however, the tide of existence flowed calmly on. All Philip Ollier's leisure time

was spent in his friend's house, and I scarcely remember the occasion when he came unaccompanied by his son Ned. The loss we had sustained seemed to strengthen the links which bound these friends together; they seemed to rely more and more upon each other; and many were the happy evenings we enjoyed listening to their conversation and to their pleasant recalling of their boyish reminiscences. Whenever we heard the words, "Do you remember, Ben?" or "Do you remember, Phil?" our attention was immediately enlisted in what was to follow. Then they would speak of their boyish freaks, their enjoyments, their aspirations, and we would listen in quiet delight to the hearty voices of these friends, who in their manhood strengthened the links which had bound them in their youth.

Philip Ollier also held the position of manager in a City house, but his salary, I understood, was not more than one-third of Benjamin Longmore's, and it was therefore incumbent upon him to be exceedingly careful in his expenditure in order to maintain an appearance of respectability. When I learned what his emoluments were I knew why he was educating his son himself; he could not afford to engage a tutor for Ned, or put him to a good school. The education of children is a very serious matter with persons in the middle class of life.

It is to be doubted, however, whether in any school or under any tutors, Ned Ollier could have been better taught than he was by his father. He was one of those lads who require but gentle directing in the path of knowledge, who pick up things for themselves and need no spurring, and when he reached manhood he was proficient in everything that was necessary for the conduct of life, either in a high or low station. With gentlemen who had received a college education he could hold his own, and he had a keen appreciation and understanding of the wants and requirements of those who moved in the lower strata. A keen sympathy, also, as events proved later on. Sometimes he reminded me of Mr. Macmillan; he had opinions, by which I felt he would stand in any circumstances, with a light regard as to whether the expression of them would bring him into favour or disfavour. He seldom put himself forward, but there were occasions when he would assert himself with thorough independence, and, as usual, with a thorough disregard of consequences. Although, as I have indi-

cated, his sympathies were with the lower classes, Ned Ollier was very much of a gentleman, even as a lad; he could be stately and dignified, as he was honourable and straightforward. He was incapable of meanness, and a blow in the face would have been preferable to him than to doubt his word. The blow he could have returned, and would, for he had a sturdy courage of his own; but the doubt would have sent the hot indignant blood rushing to his face and brows, and deprived him of the power, perhaps the inclination, to defend himself.

The business duties of Benjamin Longmore and Philip Ollier calling them from home for the greater part of the day, Ned would have been left very much alone had it not been for our house. It was the usual thing for him to make his appearance at about eleven o'clock, and remain with us till five, when he would scud home to meet his father, who was due from the City at six o'clock. Then, after dinner—if they did not dine with us, which they did about one day in three—they would generally come round and remain with us till half-past nine, when they would take their departure. I often thought what a lonely life theirs would have been if it had not been for the ties which existed between them and Benjamin Longmore, and I was genuinely glad that such a house as my master's was open to them. This disposition of their time afforded Ned an opportunity of accompanying Grace and me on our weekly visits of charity to the poorer parts of the City; and thus early they became familiar with matters of which the children of well-to-do people but very rarely have the slightest knowledge.

Benjamin Longmore never interfered with us, and never uttered a word against our proceedings. We were carrying out the wishes of the dear lady who had brought into his home its sweetest influences, and I thoroughly believe that it never entered his mind to dispute them, or to do anything to weaken them. As thoroughly do I believe that he had not the slightest sympathy with our movements. He had, indeed, so far as any action on his part could be taken as a criterion, no sympathy for the poor. This may have been because he did not think of them, because, perhaps, he was blind to certain signs around him. For some little while after my dear mistress's death I would say to him:

"Would you like to see, sir, how the charity money is being disposed of?" having papers and figures ready to show how his wife's bequest was being administered.

His answer would be :

"No, Miss Felicia, I have other things to attend to. I am perfectly satisfied that you are doing what is right."

Had he said that he took no interest in the matter, and that that was the reason why he would not examine the figures, it would have been more correct. But he gave me the money regularly, on the first of every month, in advance, and it would have been presumption on my part to have endeavoured to force him to show an interest in a matter which did not, in any sense, appeal to him.

Meanwhile, as may be imagined with two such children, the feelings which existed between Grace and Ned became firmer as time went on. Their happiest hours were spent in each other's company ; and I, knowing the wish which my dear mistress had entertained, neglected no means to cement their mutual affection.

Our home was not entirely a serious home. I am impelled to make this remark because I feel that I am writing somewhat seriously—which may be because I am by nature rather serious, and because I am writing by the light of later events. We had games, we had music, we had a fair share of fun and gaiety. Sometimes we all went to the theatre together—not Grandmamma Longmore, she was too old—and twice a year we went to the Crystal Palace. Christmas was always a happy time with us, although we had to be very careful of the simple gifts of remembrance that were exchanged because of Grandmamma Longmore's growing propensity to carry off everything of small value upon which she could lay her hands unaware. With increasing years, Grandmamma Longmore's peculiarities in this respect became more marked ; but so extraordinarily astute and careful was she—I don't like to use the word "cunning" ; but, after all, it might be the proper word—that we never once detected her in these pilfering actions.

"Grandmamma," Grace would say, "what a pretty Christmas card you sent me!"

"I thought it was pretty, Grace."

"It was the one with the doves, grandmamma, wasn't it?"

"Yes, Grace, with two white doves. Let me look at it again."

"But, grandmamma, it is gone."

"Gone, child ! Nonsense !"

"I put it on the mantelshelf," said Grace, "and left the room just for one little minute, and when I came back it was gone. Now, who could have taken it ?"

"Ah !" said Grandmamma Longmore, putting on her considering cap, "who ?"

"You don't know, do you, grandmamma ?"

"I, child ! What an idea ! Perhaps it was the cat."

"Oh, grandmamma ! the cat !"

"Why not, child ? The doves looked very real, and cats are fond of birds."

It was useless to pursue the enquiry ; the card was gone, and there was no recovering it. Grandmamma Longmore did not take important things—that was one comfort—only little things ; and if we had any small article of special value, we were very careful to keep it out of her clutches.

The one party we gave every year was given a few days after Christmas. It was a children's party, to strip the Christmas tree, and the jolly time the children had was something to remember. Benjamin Longmore was always present, of course ; but he did not take an active part in the proceedings, the life and soul of which was Philip Ollier, who on those occasions was more boy than man. It was on the day following one of these merry gatherings that a notable incident occurred, which may fitly here be related, especially as some sort of binding engagement was entered into between Benjamin Longmore and Edward Ollier—though one was a mature man and the other a very young lad—with respect to Grace.

#### CHAPTER XI.

##### NED OLLIER MAKES A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE, AND GIVES A PROMISE.

I CANNOT say whether what occurred was the result of a secret understanding between Ned and Grace ; neither of them ever told me it was, but I had my own ideas on the subject. Perhaps it was some story they read together which led to the idea that the time had arrived when an open declaration of intentions ought to be made.

Grace, always very sweet and pretty, looked especially so at this year's Christmas party, and was much courted by the little boys who were present. Unlike most very

young ladies, and perhaps as many some what older, Grace was not a flirt, and she did not contribute to the breaking of Ned's heart by showing any special favour to the young cavaliers who thronged around her with a decided inclination for stolen kisses. The disclosure may here be made that Grace, early in the year of this Christmas, had exhibited poetic proclivities, and had burst forth into verse. She had received a valentine from Ned, which so stirred her that she went straightway into a corner and composed a poem to her sweetheart, the first verse of which ran as follows :

My heart did never beat before,  
As it did beat just now;  
I want you but to keep to me,  
And I'll give my hand to thou.

What boy in the world could have resisted such a rhyme, and surrender so complete ?

Well, it was on the day following the Christmas party, or rather on the evening following it, that Ned, in defiance of established usage, made his declaration in the presence of all assembled in the cosy sitting-room.

Grandmamma Longmore was dozing, or pretending to doze ; I was busy with my needle ; Grace and Ned were sitting in a corner, probably debating the very subject which was to be disclosed to us ; and Benjamin Longmore and Philip Ollier were fighting a battle over the draught-board.

Suddenly Ned rose, and going close to the two gentlemen, said abruptly :

"Mr. Longmore, I want to marry Gracie."

The friends looked up from the draught-board, much amused and astonished ; and Grandmamma Longmore, all at once very wide awake, cried :

"What ! What !"

I stopped in my work, and turned towards the group, with a smile on my lips.

"Say that again, Ned," said Benjamin Longmore.

Ned, without the slightest hesitation, repeated :

"I want to marry Gracie."

"This is serious, Phil," said Benjamin Longmore, pushing away the board. "The game's yours. I don't know why I made that ridiculous move ; other things in my head. So," to Ned, "you want to marry Gracie ?"

"Yes, sir," said Ned.

"And you, Gracie ?" to his daughter.

"It is all settled, papa," said Gracie, without a blush on her face. "We have been engaged ever so long."

"That being the case," said Benjamin Longmore to Philip Ollier, "we have very little to say in the matter." Philip Ollier smiled, but there was something thoughtful in the smile which struck me. "Marriage, Ned," continued Benjamin Longmore, "is a rather serious affair."

"We know that, papa," said Grace, who had risen, and was now standing by Ned's side, "and we are serious."

"Really and truly, Grace ?"

"Really and truly, papa."

"But what are you going to marry upon, Ned ?" asked Benjamin Longmore.

Ned looked rather puzzled at this, but he brightened up immediately, and answered :

"Why, upon this carpet, sir."

Grandmamma Longmore burst into an immoderate fit of laughter, declaring in the midst of it that those children would be the death of her, which afterwards became rather a favourite declaration with her when she was tickled by their proceedings.

"If you have settled it between you," said Benjamin Longmore, "why do you ask for my consent ?"

Ned considered a moment, and then replied :

"No gentleman would marry another gentleman's daughter without asking the other gentleman's consent."

This sent Grandmamma Longmore into another fit of laughter, recovering from which she observed :

"A very proper remark, Miss Felicia, really a very proper remark. That boy has a sense beyond his years."

"What do you say, Phil ?" asked Benjamin Longmore.

"What do you say, Ben ?" asked Philip Ollier, treating the matter lightly, as of course we all did ; but still with the thoughtful manner which had struck me at first.

This thoughtfulness seemed to attract Benjamin Longmore's observation.

"No gentleman," he said, repeating Ned's words, "would marry another gentleman's daughter without the other gentleman's consent."

"Certainly not, sir," said Ned.

"Is that your opinion, too, Grace ?"

"Oh, yes, papa. I say whatever Ned says."

"The question is," said Benjamin Longmore, "whether Ned, when he is a man, will hold to that opinion. Because, although you might be married now as boy and girl, you would have to be married all over again as man and woman."

"Should we, papa ?"

"Undoubtedly, Grace. I have no objection to this preliminary marriage if Ned and you will hold to what you say."

"We will hold to it, sir," said Ned, adding rather loftily, "I never go back from my word."

"What do you say to that, Grace?"

"I agree with Ned," said Grace, comprehensively, "in everything."

"So be it," said Benjamin Longmore. "We agree. Eh, Phil?"

"Yes, Ben."

Upon that the children went back to their corner, with a settled conviction that they had just gone through a very solemn ceremony.

The next day Grace went to her money-box and emptied it. Benjamin Longmore gave his daughter sixpence a week, about half of which she spent upon herself and her innocent fancies, such as buying birthday cards and birthday gifts of her own choosing for her father and Grandmamma Longmore and me; the other half was allowed to accumulate in her box.

"Help me to count it, Miss Felicia."

The little piles of copper and silver amounted to nineteen shillings.

"That will be enough to commence with, Miss Felicia, won't it?" she asked.

"To commence what with, Grace?"

"Housekeeping," she replied, quite gravely. "I must invite Ned to dinner, and I must get a cooking-stove."

So we went out, and with her nineteen shillings purchased a child's cooking-stove and a cookery-book to match, with which Grace began her lessons in housekeeping. The meals which, with my assistance, she prepared were not very substantial, but they were enjoyed as children enjoy such things, and the time was not thrown away. It gave her, at all events, a taste for such matters, which was likely to be profitable in the future; in addition to which it was fair amusement for the days of childhood.

There is no need for me to dwell longer upon these early years in the lives of Grace and Ned. The promise of beauty in our dear girl was fulfilled. She grew straight and lovely as a lily—a fitting simile, for her soul, as well as her body, was the emblem of purity. In the best sense of the word, Grace was becoming a lady, as Ned was becoming a gentleman—lady and gentleman, I mean, in true feeling, not in fine ladies' and gentlemen's ways. In all respects they were showing themselves to be what I, their dear and true friend, would have had them to be, such as,

they were my own children, I would have had them to be. I pass, therefore, over the intervening years until Ned was twenty-one and Grace nearly seventeen years of age. Philip Ollier had found a situation for his son in a mercantile office; not a very lucrative situation, nor one which offered much promise for the future. Ned's salary was a hundred a year, and upon that and what his father earned they rubbed along pretty comfortably. The children's liking for each other was developing into a stronger feeling. I, who watched them with wisdom and affection, saw that clearly. They loved each other, but Ned had not spoken, and if he had seriously reviewed his position with any idea of matrimony, he must have known that he could not offer to Grace such a home as he would have wished her to occupy.

## CHAPTER XII.

"IT WAS YOUR MOTHER'S FONDEST WISH."

How did the trouble commence—in what way did the beautiful link between friend and friend begin to grow weaker? Instead of indulging in speculation, it will be best to narrate actual facts and occurrences.

The firm in which Philip Ollier was employed fell into difficulties. It was spoken of one night when we were all together.

"Things are going badly at the office," said Philip Ollier.

"In what way?" asked Benjamin Longmore, not with the interest he would have exhibited of old, but in a lukewarm manner.

Philip Ollier, however, did not appear to notice this.

"Business has been falling off for some time," he replied. "There is a talk of retrenchment. Two clerks who have been with us twenty years have received notice."

Benjamin Longmore nodded carelessly, and remarked: "Changes must come, of course."

"It seems hard, Ben."

"I don't know so much about that; some must go to the wall." Then, as if a deeper show of interest was expected of him, he asked: "Have you any idea of the cause of the trouble?"

"The young members of the firm have been speculating rashly outside their business."

"Oh," said Benjamin Longmore, "specu-

lating; but how are people to make money if they don't speculate?"

"There is the steady road, Ben; it is the easiest and pleasantest."

"That is one view. The easiest and pleasantest thing is to make money."

"Do you mean to make money anyhow?"

"No, I don't mean anyhow," said Benjamin Longmore, with irritation. "I mean by shrewdness, by watching the markets, by taking advantage of opportunities."

Philip Ollier did not pursue the subject; he felt, as I did, the lack of sympathy in his old friend.

These few words strengthened, if it did not confirm, an impression which had forced itself upon me that Benjamin Longmore was stepping out of his regular groove. In which direction I did not then know, but I had a suspicion that it was in the direction of speculation for the purpose of striving to make money.

On another occasion Philip Ollier said, sadly:

"The fears I have entertained have become a certainty. Our firm is breaking up; there is a talk of the creditors being called together. Some of our bills have been returned."

"What do you intend to do?" asked Benjamin Longmore.

"Heaven knows. If the worst happens I shall be thrown on my beam ends. I don't exactly see what I am fitted for after so long a service. A bad feature in the affair is that I have not been able to save anything."

"Nothing?"

"Not a shilling. I owe nothing, that is one comfort. I am greatly worried about Ned; I hoped to be able to do something for him. I am afraid now he will have to depend entirely upon himself."

"Well, we had to do the same."

"Times are changed," said Philip Ollier, sadly. "Once there was a fair likelihood of a man obtaining a situation if he was fitted for it. Now there are a hundred applicants ready to rush into any chance opening. If I were a younger man I should emigrate."

"You might do worse even now," said Benjamin Longmore.

Not so would he have spoken in bygone years at the prospect of a separation with his friend; he would have been ready to offer sympathy and counsel, to suggest this and that.

"Yes," said Philip Ollier, thoughtfully, "I might do worse even now. I have my

health and strength, thank God, but the breaking of old ties is a wrench. The castles we built when we were boys were air-built castles in very truth."

"I have not said farewell to mine," observed Benjamin Longmore.

"Why, do you cling to them still?"

"Of course I do."

"I envy you; mine have faded long ago. Do you remember Mon Repos, Ben?"

"I never forget it. I made up my mind to be its master one day, and one day I shall be."

Philip Ollier stared at his old friend, and said:

"You were always tenacious. I remember at school how you stuck to any opinion you expressed, whether you were right or wrong."

"The mastiff quality," said Benjamin Longmore; "yes, I am not ashamed of it. I wasn't cut out for a weathercock. Before I die I shall realise all my wishes; and as for dying, I have a good many years before me yet. I am still a young man, only forty-two; I have the advantage of you by two years."

"You have the advantage of me in every way," said Philip Ollier, somewhat sadly; "you have more spirit, more pluck, more determination. However," and his voice grew more cheerful, "it will never do to despond. I have plenty to be thankful for. There's Ned, as fine and honourable a lad as you would meet with in a day's march. Is it nothing to have a son like him? Is it nothing to know that you have such a brave, true heart to depend upon? We are going to have some fine times in the future; the sun hasn't done shining yet."

"Of course it hasn't," said Benjamin Longmore. "It all rests with ourselves. If you walk about with a despondent face, if you tell your friends that times are hard with you, all that they will say is, 'Oh, he's going to the dogs.' Just the same if you're not feeling well, and if every time you're asked how you are, you answer, 'I feel very bad,' all your friends will say, 'It's quite plain what is the matter with him; he's breaking up.' Never cry 'Wolf,' Phil."

There were present at this conversation only the two friends and myself, and I was quite glad to hear Benjamin Longmore say "Phil." Philip Ollier had addressed his friend a good many times by the old familiar name "Ben," and it had jarred upon me that my master seemed to pur-

posely avoid a reciprocal cordiality. It cheered Philip Ollier up, too.

"That is sound philosophy, Ben," he said; "but I don't think I give way before anybody but you—and our good friend, Miss Felicia," he added, with a smile. "I know something of the world, though I've not studied it as deeply as you have done. Thank you for your advice, old fellow; I'll profit by it, and nobody shall see me with anything but a cheerful face. By the way, Ben, you give me an impression that things are brightening with you."

"Do I?" asked Benjamin Longmore, and there was something secretive in his tone and manner.

"Yes, and I sincerely hope that my impression is correct."

"Well," said Benjamin Longmore, and I now detected a kind of boastfulness in his voice, "I am not going to the bad, at all events."

"Which means that you are on the other road," said Philip Ollier.

"Well, yes, if you like."

"I heartily congratulate you. I shall live to see you ride in your carriage."

"Of that," said Benjamin Longmore, "I haven't very much doubt."

At this point Grace and Ned entered the room, and the conversation came to an end. Their faces shone with a new tenderness, and a glad hope animated me. It had been inexpressibly painful to me to observe the weakening of the sweet tie of friendship between the fathers of these young people. In my judgement of the affairs of life, it did not need that I should be told such and such a thing in so many words; I judged generally by signs, and the signs that were presented and were visible to me in the intercourse of the two old friends foretold a break between them. One of the most conspicuous of these signs was the dropping of the song they so often used to sing, "When we were boys together." For quite twelve months past it had not been started by either of them, and I missed it sadly. I do not know if the other members and friends of the household missed it as I did, and whether they drew the same conclusions as myself. Grandmamma Longmore thought of little else than herself and the passing hour; and the unexpressed love which existed between Grace and Ned prevented them from seeing what I saw—for love, as well as old age, is in its way selfish and all-absorbing. If I were right in my foreboding of an impending break in the long friendship of

Benjamin Longmore and Philip Ollier, how would it be with Grace and Ned? My reflections in that direction did not add to my cheerfulness, and I could not imagine any sadder occurrence than the separation of these two young people because of the separation of their parents, to whom they owed both love and duty. But now, as they came into the room, my face, my heart, grew brighter. Something had passed between them. What? That it was something sweet and good, something that gladdened them as it gladdened me, was certain; and I burned to learn the truth. It was disclosed to me before I went to bed.

Grace and I occupied adjoining bedrooms, between which there was a communicating door, and it was our habit to converse for half an hour or so before we bade each other good night. It was a favourite occupation of mine during this half-hour to do Grace's hair, which was very long and beautiful, and she allowed me to employ myself because she knew it afforded me pleasure. So on this night I brushed the brown tresses, and peeping over Grace's shoulder saw her smiling happily to herself. I bent forward and kissed her, and said:

"Have you anything to tell me, Gracie?" She blushed as she answered: "Yes; but I don't know how to commence."

"Wait a moment, darling."

I finished my task, and drawing a chair close to the lovely girl, said:

"Well, Gracie?"

What did she do but clasp me round the neck, and hide her face on my shoulder!

"Is it about Ned, darling?"

"Yes."

The whisper of a rose could scarcely have been softer and sweeter.

"Has he spoken, darling?"

"Yes."

"Now," I said, with a tender caress, "tell me what he said, and how it came about."

"That is the hardest part, dear Miss Felicia," Grace whispered. "I don't know, and I don't think Ned could tell you. It was all so sudden, and it was through another person, not through ourselves. We met Mrs. Anderson, or rather Mrs. Anderson met us, for we did not see her till she came up to us."

"Yes, Gracie."

I may mention here that the Mrs. Anderson she referred to was a poor woman whom we had befriended. She was a

young woman, but twelve months married when we first came across her. Her husband had met with an accident, and was in the hospital, and she had been left penniless, with a young baby to care for. By our help she managed to tide over evil times, and when her husband was well enough to leave the hospital, we had been fortunate enough to obtain a situation for him. They had had a hard struggle, but had battled bravely on, and now they were about to emigrate, a friend in New Zealand having sent them, in answer to an appeal they had made to him, a sum sufficient to pay their passage across. It was this good news that the grateful woman, seeing Grace, hastened to communicate to her.

"She spoke so beautifully," Grace said, "and hoped you would come and see her. Their ship sails to-morrow week. She had the letter in her pocket, and she read part of it to me. Their friend in Australia is in a good way of business, and they are going out to a situation in his store. He is a single gentleman, and he offers Mr. Anderson two pounds a week, and fifteen shillings a week to Mrs. Anderson if she will do the cooking. Of course she is going to do it; and their friend says in his letter that in three or four years they will be able to save money enough to set up in business for themselves if they wish to leave him then. She declares, dear Miss Felicia, that, if it hadn't been for us, this good fortune would never have happened to them, for it was you who advised and persuaded her to write to their friend. She is so grateful, and she cried as she told us all about it. And then she said, looking at me and Ned, that she hoped we would be as happy as we had made her. That was the commencement of it; and when she went away, sending her blessing to you, dear Miss Felicia, I was crying too, because of the beautiful way she spoke. I cannot tell you exactly what happened after that. Ned and I were very quiet for a little while, and then Ned said something, and I answered him, and he told me he loved me, and—oh! my dear second mother, how shall I say it?—I told him that I loved him. Was it wrong? Tell me, tell me, dear Miss Felicia."

"You spoke out of your heart, darling," I said, wiping my eyes, "and you did what was right. It was your mother's fondest wish that you and Ned should be to each other what you have promised to be."

"Was it, dear Miss Felicia, was it?

Oh, how happy Ned will be to hear it! My darling mother told you so, though I was so young when she was taken from us? What a happiness, what a happiness that her wish—and ours, dear Miss Felicia, our dearest, our only wish—should be fulfilled!"

Then, searching my memory, I recalled all that had been said by my dear mistress about Grace and Ned, and the happy girl listened with folded hands and a rapt expression on her lovely face.

"She had the highest opinion of Ned, dear Grace. The last time he saw her, when she bade him farewell, knowing she had not long to live—hush, my darling, hush! It was God's will, and your mother was resigned—she said to him that he and you were in the playtime of life, and that by-and-by he would be a man and you a woman; and that it was then she wanted him to be true to you. He answered that he would never be anything else."

"He has been, he will be, dear Miss Felicia."

"I am sure of it."

"My dear, good mother!"

"She had a great wish, Gracie, to dream of your future, and she used to go to sleep praying that she might see it in her dreams. Before she bade farewell to your Ned—"

"Yes, dear Miss Felicia, to my Ned. My Ned!"

"Her wish was gratified. Waking from a sleep, she told me that she saw you a bright and beautiful woman, and that Ned was with you. 'It will be, dear Felicia,' she said to me. 'It is a message from heaven!' And now, at this moment, dear child, she sees you, and rejoices."

Grace sank to her knees, and I did not disturb her, but looked down upon her beautiful form, my heart throbbing with gratitude. Presently she rose and nestled close to me.

"Ned is going to speak to papa to-morrow," she said.

My mind was troubled a little as I said:

"It is proper that he should do so, dear."

"What worries Ned," she continued, "is his position. He is not earning much; but we can wait."

"Yes, dear, you are both young. You can wait for two or three years till Ned is in a better position."

"Do you know what he said, Miss Felicia, after it—was—all—settled?" The

prettiest blush accompanied these words as they dropped slowly from her lips. "That he was afraid he had done wrong in speaking to me so soon, and that if he had thought properly of it he would have held his tongue. I had to chide him for that, and I told him—I hope it was not bold—that he should think of me as well as of himself. He said he was always thinking of me, and that it was for my sake he ought to have left it till next year, or the year after, when he saw his way to provide a home for us. You will be with us, will you not, Miss Felicia?"

"If you wish it, dear."

"I do wish it, and so does Ned. And then he corrected himself, and said he was glad, after all, that he had spoken when he did, because somebody else might have stepped in, and he would be too late. As if anybody could! As if I would have listened to any one else!"

And so the dear child went on till I told her it was time for her to get to bed. She obeyed me, but begged me not to leave her till she was quite tired out. I sat by her bedside, and we talked a little longer, and then she fell asleep with a smile on her lips.

Kissing her softly, I retired to my room, and began to think.

Sometimes during my musings I buoyed myself up with the thought that all would end right, and that this new bond between the children would restore the old harmonious bond between their parents. Then I was worried by the remembrance of Benjamin Longmore's coldness towards Philip Ollier, by his lack of sympathy in his friend's approaching trials, by his selfish engrossment of his own schemes and desires. I was tossed this way and that, now seeing nothing but light, now seeing nothing but darkness. I debated how Benjamin Longmore would receive the declaration which Ned was to make on the morrow, and at one moment I was joyful, the next despondent. I took myself to task.

"You are very proud of your powers of observation, Felicia," I said; "you think yourself very clever in getting at the heart of things without anything being said. You have an intuition, truly, a fine intuition which makes you look on the gloomy side. How do you know what is passing in the mind of your master, who was a good husband to his wife, who is a good father to his child? Hope for the best, Felicia, hope for the best."

I stole into Gracie's room; she had not stirred, and the happy smile was still on her lips. So I crept into bed, and fell asleep, too, hoping for the best.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### POOR NED.

IT happened on the next morning that my master, of his own free will, afforded me an insight into what was passing in his mind. He called me to his study, in which he was in the habit of writing his private letters, and locked the door.

"I wish to speak to you," he commenced, "upon a particular subject."

I held my breath. Was it about Grace and Ned? He continued:

"You will please to keep to yourself what passes between us. I must exact that promise from you."

"It is given, sir," I said.

"You will not divulge it to any friend of mine, not even to my daughter?"

"I promise you, sir."

"I am satisfied with your word. From my long experience of you I know you are to be thoroughly trusted. The subject, Miss Felicia, is money."

"You are in no difficulty, I hope, sir?"

"Not at all; it is the other way. It is not the losing of money, but the making of it, I am about to speak of. You are good at figures."

"Yes, sir."

It was, indeed, one of my few special gifts; I was something more than a good arithmetician, I was a clever one.

"What I shall impart to you," he said, "will come as a revelation. I need a secretary to make up certain accounts from time to time, under my direction, and to verify such accounts as I shall myself make out, in order to prevent mistakes. I wish you to undertake this duty."

"I am entirely at your service, sir."

"This new duty may render it necessary that another female should be engaged in the house, who will look after matters to which you have hitherto given your attention—household matters, I mean. You can engage such a person."

"I must not be taken from Grace, sir."

"There will be no need for that; you will continue to be to her what you have always been—a wise friend and companion. Miss Felicia, you will be surprised to hear

that I am bent upon becoming a rich man, and that I set the greatest possible value upon—Money."

I make a break before his present utterance of the word because he did so himself, and I put a capital M to it because he spoke it with emphasis.

I was not at all surprised at the revelation. Any surprise I may have felt was caused by his ignorance of my knowledge of him. He had entirely ignored my intuitive powers and my faculty of observation.

"Yes, Miss Felicia, upon money. During the last twelve months certain opportunities of speculation have been presented to me, and I have in a small way taken advantage of them. Before very long I hope to take advantage of these opportunities in a larger way. Of course you are ignorant of these matters, and therefore, I do not seek your advice concerning them. All I seek is your assistance in the manipulation of figures, under my direction. You are willing?"

He was my master; he could command my services; but not for those reasons alone did I immediately reply that I was willing. There was a wish in my mind to become acquainted with his movements in the direction he directed, and a latent hope that my knowledge of them might be turned to favourable advantage for those I loved.

"To speak plainly," he said, "I am engaged in speculation in stocks and shares, and I want certain tables prepared from week to week which will be a guide to me in my operations."

He then set before me a number of cuttings from newspapers, all referring to fluctuations in the stock and share markets, and he further explained to me that one part of my new duties was to make similar cuttings from newspapers which he had ordered to be sent to the house, and to paste and arrange them in a book side by side, for the purposes of study and comparison. I soon understood his directions, and was satisfied that I could properly carry them out. I was satisfied of another thing as well—that he had already made money, and that his desire to become the master of the grand house and estate known as Mon Repos was not such a wild idea as I had hitherto supposed it to be, given, of course, that it was ever thrown into the market.

Matters being thus far advanced in our interview, he was about to dismiss me

when we heard a knock at the door. He opened it, and a servant said that Mr. Edward Ollier had asked to see him.

"I will leave you now, sir," I said, with a prayer in my heart that Ned's errand might have a successful issue.

"No," said Benjamin Longmore, "remain."

If I had thought that expostulation would have availed me, I should have said that he had better see Ned alone, but there was that in my master's tone which compelled obedience. So I remained, unwillingly.

"Can I speak to you alone, Mr. Longmore?" said Ned, upon his entrance.

"You can say what you have to say before Miss Felicia," was Benjamin Longmore's reply to this request.

"I should like to say it privately, sir," urged poor Ned.

"I have nothing private from Miss Felicia," said Benjamin Longmore.

My heart fell. It was not in this way he used to speak to Ned. It used to be "Ned, my boy," or "Well, Ned?" or some hearty prompting of that kind; but now there was no cordiality in voice or manner.

"It is about Grace, sir," said Ned, feeling the coldness as I felt it.

"Oh, about Grace," said Benjamin Longmore. "Be seated, Miss Felicia. Well?"

He did not even ask Ned to take a chair.

"I told her last night," said Ned, "that I would come and speak to you."

How I pitied the young fellow. At the best, it was a nervous errand upon which he had come, but Benjamin Longmore's reception of him made his task a hundred times more difficult.

"Yes," said Benjamin Longmore, with displeasure in his eyes, "you told her last night that you were coming to speak to me. What did my daughter say to that?"

"That it would be right for me to do so."

"Go on," said Benjamin Longmore, coldly.

The young fellow drew a long breath, straightened himself, and spoke now manfully as well as modestly.

"We love each other, sir."

Benjamin Longmore had turned his face from us, and I saw him playing with a paper-knife that lay on the table.

"Do I understand," he asked, without

looking at Ned, "that you have been making love to my daughter behind my back!"

"Not behind your back, sir," replied Ned, with a dignity for which I admired him. "We have been together since childhood."

"Yes, it was very unwise on my part. But you have not replied to my question."

"You have seen everything, sir, except that last night I allowed my feelings to get the better of me, and spoke when perhaps I should not have spoken."

"That is properly said. You should not have spoken. Your declaration should first have been made to me."

"I admit it, sir, and I have no excuse to offer, only that my feelings overcame me. I love Grace dearly, and she loves me."

"A child's fancy."

"No, sir, indeed. Grace is no longer a child."

"She has but just passed her seventeenth year," said Benjamin Longmore, "and is, I repeat, a child—even more of a child than most girls of her age, for she has seen absolutely nothing of the world."

I could have interposed here, and said that Grace knew more, not less, of the world than most young ladies of her age. Her visits in my company to administer her mother's legacy to the wretched and suffering had opened her eyes to the true issues of life, and she had often surprised me by the depth and good sense of her remarks. But I held my tongue; I could best serve her and Ned—and I determined to serve them to the uttermost of my power, even in the teeth of an obdurate father—by saying nothing to displease him. In this resolve I was aware that I was practising a certain duplicity, but I believed myself justified by the issue at stake—the happiness of my dear Grace.

"It would be taking advantage of her inexperience," continued Benjamin Longmore, "to bind her to a rash promise of which she might repent hereafter. You must see that yourself."

"I do not think, sir," said Ned, "that her promise was a rash one, and I am the last man in the world to hold her to it if she wished to be released."

"I do not question your sincerity or good intentions; but I am speaking from one standpoint, you from another, and I know what is best for my child. Come, come," he said, with an assumption of good humour, "give up this idle fancy. You are not in a position to provide for a

home, and your father is not in a position to assist you. And if this were not as I say, Grace is too young to marry."

"My fancy is not an idle one, sir," said Ned, respectfully and firmly; "my love for Grace is rooted in my heart, and I have every hope and belief that it is the same with her. You are quite right in saying that I am not in a position to marry, and that Grace is too young. But in a few years, say three, things will be different. I shall work hard to make a position, and I shall succeed—yes, sir, I shall succeed. Grace and I are both content to wait. Will that content you, Mr. Longmore?"

"No," said Benjamin Longmore, and so dark a cloud stole into his face that I saw it would go ill with poor Ned, "it does not content me. I will not have my child absolutely bound for three of the brightest years of her life. There must be an end to the foolish affair, here and now. I have the right, as her father, to demand this of you."

"Pardon me, sir, the right rests with Grace and me. I cannot consent, unless Grace bids me do so, to forego the one hope of my life. I implore you to think more favourably of me. You and my father have always been such good friends—he has the sincerest love for you, as I have—and you have always been so good and kind to me, that your refusal comes with a shock upon me. I am not rich, but I am a gentleman; my dear father made me one, and it is through his teaching that I know what is right—through his teaching that I shall be able to conduct myself with honour."

"That is not the point," said Benjamin Longmore. "I must speak more plainly. If you act in opposition to my wishes I shall be compelled to forbid you my house."

Ned quivered as though an arrow had been implanted in his breast.

"There is no need to do that, sir," he said, sadly, "and I hope you will not, for my father's sake. It would be like breaking his life off in the middle."

There was not much in the words to powerfully impress a man in Benjamin Longmore's present temper; but, nevertheless, they must have struck some chord within him to cause him to say, in a more conciliatory tone:

"Come, we will make a bargain. Let things remain as they were, not as they are, for three years, and during that period

engage yourself not to make love to Grace. She will have time to become better acquainted with the world, to know her own heart better, to see other men, to mix, perhaps, a little in society ; and you will have time to work and advance yourself. The test I propose will serve not only the purposes I have named, but another of which I must convince myself ; it will prove, or disprove, your constancy."

Ned caught eagerly at the hope which this proposal contained ; it was a long way from the best he could hope for ; but it was also not the worst he had dreaded within a few moments after he entered the room. Sure of his own heart, sure of Grace's, he said :

"If Grace is willing, sir, I am."

"Then there is an end of the matter for the present," said Benjamin Longmore. "I will speak to Grace myself, and you shall hear the result from her lips or mine. I remember some words you spoke when you and Grace were little children. You asked for my consent to marry her—I dare say you have not forgotten it."

"Indeed, I have not, sir."

"Well, the words were — wait a moment," he paused, searching his mind — "yes, I have them, I think. You said that no gentleman would marry another gentleman's daughter without the other gentleman's consent. Am I correct ?"

"Yes, sir," said Ned, "they were my very words."

"I answered, I remember," continued Benjamin Longmore, "that the question was whether when you were a man you would hold to that, and you replied that you would not go back from your word. Give me now your assurance that you will not marry Grace without my consent, and prove yourself a man of honour."

"I give you the assurance, sir," said poor Ned.

"I accept it, in spirit and letter. Now there is nothing more to be said at present. In three years we will have another chat upon this subject. Meanwhile, get rich."

"That shall be my endeavour, sir."

And away Ned went, after shaking hands with Benjamin Longmore and me, hesitating just a moment with a longing in his mind to see our dear Grace ; but it was a longing to which he dared not give expression. He was not yet her accepted lover.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

PHILIP OLLIER BIDS US FAREWELL.

NED being gone, Benjamin Longmore asked me to say nothing to Grace about his proposal.

"But she must be told, sir," I said.

"She shall be, by me. I will see her before I leave the house."

"If she asks me, sir, whether I was present when the proposal was made, I must answer truthfully."

"Certainly ; but you need not be too communicative. Do not excite her ; counsel her to be guided entirely by me. I have a great respect for you, Miss Felicia, but in such matters as this my authority must not be disputed or weakened."

I bowed, and went to Grace and sent her down to her father, waiting anxiously in my room for the result of the interview. I was prepared for tears, for despondency, for hints at rebellion ; but I am thankful to say I was mistaken. Instead of rejoining me with a melancholy face, Grace came in radiant.

"It is all right, Miss Felicia," she said ; "we are to wait three years. That is just what we expected. Papa was very kind, although he did not speak quite so enthusiastically about Ned as he ought to have done ; but I can't expect him to look at Ned with my eyes, can I ?"

"No, dear. Has your father, then, consented to an engagement ?"

"Well, not exactly an engagement ; he wasn't quite clear in what he said. I think he was bothered a little because I spoke so plainly—yes, I did, Miss Felicia. I told him I loved Ned, and Ned only, and that I should never love any one else, in that way, you know, and that in a hundred years from now it would be just the same with me. I think, too, he is bothered about business, poor dear ! Men do have a lot of worries, don't they, Miss Felicia ? Then he looks upon me as if I was still a little child, and actually asked me how it was possible for me to know my own mind. I am not sure that I convinced him that I did know it, but I spoke very freely about Ned and myself, and I asked him if Ned wasn't the brightest, the handsomest, the manliest gentleman he had ever known. There again he was not as enthusiastic as he ought to have been ; and I told him so. Papa sent for me to speak to me ; but I think, dear Miss Felicia," she said, with a sweet laugh, "that it was I who spoke to him."

That was evident. I had feared that she would enter her father's presence with timidity and doubt; but instead of that she had met him with full confidence in him, in herself, and in the right and justice of her cause. Never have I seen in my dear Grace the least sign of boldness; but she has no false modesty, and can stand firm as a rock when she believes herself to be right.

"But you have not told me," I said, "about the engagement."

"Haven't I? I am a little excited, you know. Well, papa said he would prefer there should be no absolute engagement between us, but I answered that I had told Ned I loved him—which I do, which I do, Miss Felicia, with all my heart and soul—and that nothing could alter that. Then he said that Ned had promised to wait three years, and I said that I promised, too. 'In the meantime,' papa said, 'there is to be no engagement.' 'But there is one, papa,' I answered. 'Ned has told me he loves me, and I have told Ned I love him. There it is, in a nutshell.' 'Keep it in the nutshell,' papa said. 'Let it be a private matter between ourselves; don't let people know.' I said I didn't think of letting people know—as if we should go about talking of it, Miss Felicia!—and in the end papa said, 'I hope, Grace, you will respect my wishes,' and I said of course I would, and called him a silly dear for saying such a thing to me, and went away telling him that I was the happiest, happiest girl in all the world. And I am, dear Miss Felicia."

From this account of the interview I inferred that Benjamin Longmore must have been somewhat taken aback by his daughter's attitude, and that, in the light of her ingenuousness, and of her trust in him and her own heart, his arguments had crumbled to dust.

I know what passed between Grace and Ned that night.

"Papa has spoken to me, Ned," she said, "and we are to wait three years."

"And meanwhile?" asked Ned, anxiously.

"Meanwhile," she answered, with a charming smile, "we are to love each other very much."

I don't know how Ned reconciled things in his own mind, but he passed a happy evening, and I am sure he went away loving his dear girl more than ever, if that were possible, and with a thorough belief that she would be true to him what-

ever was the fate fortune had in store for him.

Stirring events were soon to claim our attention; in our own house clouds were brightening, from a worldly point of view, but over our dear friends, the Olliers, dark clouds were gathering.

One day I was informed that Mr. Ollier was downstairs, and wished to see me. It was an unusual hour for him to call, the middle of the day, and I felt that something had happened. There was trouble in his face, and I clasped his hand warmly.

"I come to speak to a friend," he said.

"She is here, Mr. Ollier," I said.

"You have a true heart, Miss Felicia. You see, except Ned, I have no one to confide in."

He spoke in a helpless way, and I sincerely pitied him.

"Open your heart to me, Mr. Ollier," I said; "a mouse once helped a lion."

"Have you heard nothing concerning me?" he asked.

"Nothing of any importance," I replied.

"Mr. Longmore has known it for the last two weeks, I thought it likely he might have mentioned it. Miss Felicia, I have lost my situation."

"I am truly, truly sorry, Mr. Ollier."

"Yes, it is a thing to be sorry for; and yet there rises sometimes an odd fancy that I shall be thankful for it in the future. You see, Miss Felicia, men may work too much and too long in one groove, and if that groove be not a golden one, there he is, at the end of a long life of service, no better off than he was at the commencement. Our firm has stopped payment, and the business is being wound up. Unfortunately, my emoluments have been so small, that, as fast as I earned money, it went out; so that now I find myself without the means to support our home. Ned's hundred a year will not do it, and I am not going to be a burden upon him; it is just about enough to keep himself. Then I see the shadow of another approaching trouble which seems to be hidden from Ned. The firm in which he is engaged is tottering; I have heard it whispered in the City; and there Ned will be, in the same plight as myself."

"Ned will always get on, Mr. Ollier," I said, with an endeavour to brighten him up.

"Ah, my dear Miss Felicia, you don't know what struggling men have to go through nowadays."

"What does Mr. Longmore say to all this?" I asked.

Philip Ollier rose and paced the room, which was his usual habit when he was more than ordinarily disturbed.

"I don't know how to answer you," he said, with a deeper sadness in his voice. "As age creeps on, all the strength, all the resources of our moral nature seem to be needed to sustain our faith. New and bitter lessons come and mock us, whispering that we have been living in a fool's paradise. Miss Felicia, something—I know not what—has come between my old friend and me. We are not to each other as we used to be, as I once believed we would be till we were in the last stage of all. Is the change in him or in me? I question my heart, and I can find nothing to reproach myself with—but that may be my mistake. We are blind to our own faults. There was a time when Mr. Longmore's full sympathy would have been given to me in trouble, as mine would have been given to him. But now; but now—well, he listens, and says he is sorry; but words have a soul as well as a body, and I miss the soul which once gave spiritual life to the words he addressed to me."

I did not remonstrate with him; I should not have been true to myself, to him, if I had striven to convince him that he was wrong in his impressions. The grievous change that had taken place in Benjamin Longmore was too clear to be ignored, to be argued away. It grieved me to know, from the knowledge of my master's affairs which my new duties imposed upon me, that it was in his power to assist his friend; it was only yesterday that he said to me, with an air of triumph, that he was two thousand pounds richer than he had been a month before. And still he did not step forward with that practical sympathy which the close and long intercourse between the friends demanded.

"Now," said Philip Ollier, "I am about to speak of another matter, which is indeed the principal reason for my visit. An offer has been made to me which I am hesitating whether I ought to accept. It is an offer to transact some business in Australia, which will necessitate my absence from England for a considerable time. I am not sure whether it will be eventually profitable to me, but it provides me with a salary upon which I can live, and there is a chance of something better springing from it. I have not spoken of it to Ned

yet; I came first to consult you, to ask you whether I should accept it."

"It holds out a chance of good fortune, you say?"

"Yes, Miss Felicia, it certainly does that; but it will take me from England, it will tear me from my dear lad."

"Only for a time, Mr. Ollier."

"Then you advise me to accept it?"

"Nothing better offering, Mr. Ollier," I said, firmly, "I should advise you to accept it. Through its means you may by-and-by be of assistance to your son."

"You look upon it as a duty, Miss Felicia?"

"I do, sir."

"It has presented itself to me in that light. Thank you for your advice; it has strengthened me. I shall accept the offer. Miss Felicia, my dear Ned will be here all alone."

"He will not, Mr. Ollier. Grace is here with him, and I."

"Once more I thank you, from my heart. I cannot think of anything that may arise that would deprive Ned of your friendship."

"Nothing can arise, Mr. Ollier. I promise to be a mother to him, and I will not allow him to slip from us."

He pressed my hand, and said:

"How sweet is true friendship! What balm it brings to a man's heart!"

"If the matter is decided," I asked, "how soon will you have to go?"

"Too soon. In three days I must be ready to start."

"It may be better so, Mr. Ollier—better than lingering."

"Yes, indeed. I shall screw up my courage to ask a favour of my old friend. I have a strong impression that, in case Ned loses his present situation, it may be in Mr. Longmore's power to assist him to another. Surely he will not refuse me. It is not much to ask."

"I think he would be willing," I said; and I really thought so, or I should not have said as much.

"I will ask him to-night. I should like to see Grace—not to tell her what I have told you; I shall leave that for you to do."

I called Grace down, and she received him with a kiss, and asked after Ned. Seeing that he was sad, she applied herself in a general way to cheer him up, and he left us with a lighter heart and brighter face.

A gentle melancholy pervaded our

family circle on this night. The news of Philip Ollier's approaching departure had been communicated to all, and even Benjamin Longmore was softened by the impending separation. Some shadowy spirit of the old cordiality was manifest in their conversation, and Philip Ollier, before he left, took an opportunity of informing me that my master had promised to assist Ned to a new situation in case he required one. I was thankful for that much ; but knowing that my master did nothing further to help his friend, even by the offer of a small loan, I could not but mourn over the selfishness and the greed for money which had entered his soul, and threatened to blot out all his higher and better attributes.

I will not linger upon the details of Philip Ollier's departure. I saw the leave-taking between him and Grace, but not that between him and his dear Ned, which must have been painful and heartrending.

" You must not grieve, dear Mr. Ollier," said the sweet girl as they stood together, his arm around her ; " we will take care of Ned, Miss Felicia and I. We shall not try to make him forget you, but we will help him to be cheerful and happy all the time you are away."

I remember that Philip Ollier once attempted to start the old song, " When we were boys, merry, merry boys," but he broke down in the second line.

We all stood at the street-door, watching him and Ned go down the street arm-in-arm. Presently neither Grace nor I could see their forms, our eyes being filled with tears.

When I wiped mine away I looked at Benjamin Longmore, and saw him standing on the footpath with a pre-occupied expression on his face. The next moment he turned on his heel and entered the house, his lips tightly closed, as though a pregnant chapter in his life was closed for ever.

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### GRACE CLAIMS HER SHARE OF SORROW.

WHAT Philip Ollier predicted came to pass.

It is a trite saying that misfortunes never come singly, but that does not make it less true. Before there was time for a letter to reach us from Australia, Ned's firm broke up, and he was thrown out of

employment. Benjamin Longmore was as good as his word. He offered Ned a situation in an office in the City, which, to my surprise, I learned only then that he had opened to transact his new operations in. The salary was the same as that which Ned had received, and the young man, therefore, was no better off. But he was no worse off, and the mischief of idleness was spared to him. As to the particular nature of the business that was transacted in this office, I am not in a position to offer any enlightenment. My master had imposed secrecy upon me in my new duties, and doubtless he had imposed the same obligation upon Ned, who never opened his lips upon the subject.

I was struck by certain signs in Ned which gave me pain. His new service did not seem to sit easily upon him. A thoughtfulness stole into his face, and there was now a marked constraint in his manner when we were all sitting together in Benjamin Longmore's house.

" My dear boy is not as bright as I would like him to be," said Grace to me. " The separation from his father is making him melancholy."

That may have been ; but that alone was not the cause of what I observed in him. Of course, I was ignorant of the exact business relations between him and Benjamin Longmore — I mean of their personal association—whether it was conducted agreeably or otherwise ; but it jarred upon me that Benjamin Longmore, even in our private intercourse at home, occasionally spoke to Ned with the air of a master speaking to a man in his service. It jarred upon Ned, too ; and I saw him upon those occasions look at Grace, as if to ascertain what she thought of it.

If anything could have set his mind at ease, it was my dear girl's conduct towards him. It was marked by extreme delicacy and tenderness, and she made it as plain to him as a modest maiden may that her feelings for him were those of sincere and absorbing love. It helped to comfort him, but it did not remove the cause for uneasiness and self-questioning. After a time, I heard from him that things were not going well with his father.

" He is not only ill and unfortunate, Miss Felicia," he said, " but he is breaking his heart because we are separated."

" Have you spoken to Grace of this ? " I asked.

" No," replied Ned ; " I do not wish to pain her."

"It will pain her more," I said, "when she learns that you are keeping a secret from her."

"Shall I tell her, then?" he asked.

"Yes," I said; "let there be absolute confidence between you."

It was the dear girl herself, however, who broached the subject first, at the very moment Ned was about to confide in her. We three were in the sitting-room alone; my master was in his study, poring over figures; Grandmamma Longmore was nursing a slight cold in her bedroom.

"Ned," said Grace—they spoke quite openly before me—"I have a right to share your sorrows. What is grieving you?"

"He was going to tell you to-night, dear," I said, "and has been silent only because he would keep sorrow from you."

"You must not do that, dear Ned," said Grace; "it is mine, as well as yours, and I claim my share."

Profoundly affected, Ned unbosomed himself, and gave her his father's letters to read.

"Dear Ned," said Grace, "if it were not for me you would go to him?"

"If it were not for you," said Ned, "and if I had the means, I would go to him. May I confess something to you?"

"You must, Ned; you must confess everything."

"I have been saving a little money, towards the time when we—— But I must not speak of that."

"Towards the time when we are married," said Grace, sweetly. "Go on, dear Ned."

"It is but a drop in the ocean—only twenty pounds up to now. Lately, when I have received my dear father's letters, the thought has come into my mind that what I have saved would be nearly enough to take me to him."

"And it is only because of me that you do not entertain this thought quite seriously? Tell me, dear Ned."

"Yes," said Ned, in a low tone. "I cannot bear the thought of going away from you."

"But, dear Ned," said Grace, laying her hand upon his, "your father claims your first duty. I come afterwards."

"No, no," cried Ned; but she held up her hand and stopped him.

"When I think, dear Ned," she said, "of all that your dear father is in himself, of all that he has done for you, of the love

he bears for you, my duty becomes very clear to me."

"Your duty, Grace!"

"Yes, Ned, my duty. It is not I who must keep you from his side. If he needs you, it is your duty to go to him, and my duty to tell you to go."

"And what will you do, Grace?" asked Ned, in a voice of great sadness.

"Remain here, and be true to you till better times shine on us. Yes, Ned, dear, you may be sure I shall remain true and faithful; and better times will come, be sure of that, too. Perhaps," and now she spoke in a lower tone, and her head was cast down, "there is another reason why you should go. Do you think I have not seen that you are not happy in my father's service? Do you think I have not seen how you have suffered when he has spoken to you, here, and in this room, as he should not have spoken to one so dear to us? I have seen it all, dear Ned, and I say to you, go, and Heaven bless you! Who knows? You may find in a new land the opportunity you cannot meet with here. Many another man has done it—why not you? And, Ned, dear," she concluded, a tender archness stealing into her voice, "you should go for my sake as well as for your father's. We cannot marry without papa's consent, and that he will not give till you are rich. You will have a better chance of getting rich in the new world than in the old; and though I will wait for you, if I must, till I am an old woman, I would rather not wait so long."

I cannot describe how this speech stirred us; its thoughtfulness, its unselfishness, its wisdom, its tenderness, impressed me more deeply than anything I had ever heard, and I lifted up my heart in thankfulness that our dear Grace had grown to be what her mother would have had her if she had lived to teach and guide her. As for Ned, he gazed upon the sweet girl with reverence and devotion, and I saw that she had infused into his breast in this most trying hour the hope and courage which were needed to strengthen him. And let me say here that beyond such expressions of tenderness as I have recorded there was no love-making, in the common acceptation of the term, between Grace and Ned. Tacitly consenting to Benjamin Longmore's wishes respecting their engagement, they had not kissed each other once since the night upon which they had plighted their troth. I

could not but admire and commend them for their conduct; if anything were needed to prove the purity of their love, it was this.

The result of the present conversation was that Ned said he would wait till he received the next letter from his father, and if matters had not then improved, he would go—to come back and claim Grace before the three years were expired.

As events turned out, his departure was more sudden than any of us expected. It took place on the day of the week which was devoted by Grace and me to the disposal of Mrs. Longmore's legacy, and it happened that on this day we were absent from the house for a much longer time than usual. We went out early in the morning, and did not return till nearly six o'clock in the evening. The moment we entered the house a servant gave Grace the following letter:

"MY DEAR GRACE,—I called at the house at twelve o'clock to see you, and to my bitter disappointment found you were not at home. I remembered then that this is the day for your visits to the poor, and that it was probable you would not get home till the afternoon. I cannot wait till then to see you; if I did I should miss the ship that will take me to my father. Grace, dear, I received a letter from him this morning, and I fear he is dying; I fear that I may be too late to see him alive. I dare not linger here a day, an hour, with my father's cry from the other side of the world ringing in my ears. A ship sails from Plymouth for Melbourne very early to-morrow—at sunrise I am told—and a friend has given me a note to the agents there, who will, I hope, provide me with a berth in the steerage for the twenty pounds I have been able to save out of my salary. I have just enough money besides to take me to Plymouth, a train for which place starts at three o'clock. You see I have not a minute to lose. It pains me sorely to leave so suddenly, without being able to bid you good-bye; but my duty calls me, and you will not blame me. Your father will think my sudden departure strange; I cannot help that; he will not be sorry to lose me, as he has not a high opinion of my abilities. Him, also, I have been unable to see, but I have explained to him in a letter the urgent reason for my leaving so abruptly. I have no time to write at greater length. Good-bye, dear Grace. Heaven watch over and protect you. I shall write to you from Australia, and it

would be a joy to me to find a letter from you awaiting me on my arrival. Send it to my dear father's address, where you have already written. What would I not give to be able to go on the mail steamer? But it is out of the question. I think I never realised till now the true value of money. Once more, dear Grace, good-bye. I shall never change; my heart will always be the same. Pray with me that my fears concerning my dear father are groundless, and that he will be restored to health and strength. I seem to feel that if I only arrive in time I shall be able to save him. Give my love to dear Miss Felicia. Affectionately yours,

"NED OLLIER."

In a postscript Ned gave the name of the ship he was going out in, the "Silver Queen."

Grace read this letter in silence, and, giving it to me to read, went to the window and sat there quietly. When I returned the letter, she said:

"I am glad Ned has gone. I am afraid if I wrote a letter and addressed it to him on the ship, it would not reach him in time."

"I fear not, dear."

"But we can send a telegram," she said.

We proceeded immediately to the nearest telegraph office, and the telegram was despatched:

"Dear Ned. You have done what is right. I shall pray for your safety and your dear father's recovery. Miss Felicia and I unite in love. You will be ever in my thoughts and in my heart. GRACE."

On our way home, Grace said:

"Unless papa speaks to us of Ned, I should prefer not to say anything. Ned has explained things to him, and it is for papa to speak first, if he wishes to do so."

I had nothing to urge against this proposal, divining that Grace, knowing that Ned was not greatly in favour with her father, wished not to be compelled to say anything that would vex him; for that she would stand up boldly in defence of her lover there was not, in my mind, the least doubt. But Benjamin Longmore said nothing whatever about Ned, and for a long time the young man's name was not referred to in any conversation between father and daughter. Grace, however, questioned the servant upon the subject of Ned's visit to the house.

"He seemed very much flurried, miss,"

the girl said, "and asked if no one was at home. I said only Mrs. Longmore, and he asked to see her."

This was news to us, and we hurried to Grandmamma Longmore to ascertain what Ned had said to her.

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed the old lady. "What should he say? He just called in, that was all."

"But, grandmamma," said Grace, "didn't he say something about going away?"

"Oh, yes," replied Grandmamma Longmore; "I remember now he did say something or other about a journey; but whether it was to Chelsea or China I really cannot tell you. There, don't bother me any more; I want to go to sleep."

When Grandmamma Longmore was not inclined to be communicative there was no getting anything out of her, so we left her to her repose.

The day after Ned was gone, Grace and I walked to my dear mistress's grave. We always did so, at Grace's prompting, when her heart was troubled. Benjamin Longmore had set up a tombstone, and there was a railing round the grave, which was bright and blooming with flowers. I must tell you here that, although we invariably took flowers to my honoured mistress's last earthly resting-place, and paid the man who looked after the grounds for the planting of others over the grave, its blooming appearance was not due entirely to us. Much more was done than our money would provide for, and I had not discovered by whose orders. I had repeatedly questioned the caretaker upon the subject, but he was obstinately reserved, and would not give me any information. All that he would say was:

"I am paid for what's done, and there's an end of it."

In my mind I gave the credit to Benjamin Longmore, who, I decided, had imposed silence upon the man. On the occasion of this visit, however, I was undeceived.

When we were within a few yards of the grave, I saw the man in conversation with a gentleman and a lady, who were pointing to the ground, and giving some instructions respecting it. The lady had brought with her a parcel of roots, which the man was taking from the paper she held in her hand, and arranging them about the ground as he was directed.

Approaching closer, the gentleman and lady turned to look at us.

The lady, who was young, of the same age as Grace, I judged, and almost as pretty—not quite; that I would never allow—I did not know, but the gentleman I recognised immediately. It was Mr. Macmillan.

It gave me true pleasure to see him, and to discover that it was he who had secretly helped us to make the grave bright and beautiful.

"It is you," I said, holding out my hand, "who have done this through all these years."

"It is little to do," he said, fixing his eyes on Grace very earnestly. "You need not tell me who this lady is. How she resembles her mother!" He now addressed Grace. "I remember your name; your sainted mother told me one day when she lifted me from the deepest trouble of my life. You are Miss Grace Longmore."

"Yes," said Grace.

"My name is Macmillan," he said, "and what I am I owe to her." He pointed to the grave. "This is my daughter, Mary, who holds your mother in loving and honoured remembrance. She was with me in the Park one dolorous morning, when all the world was dark, and my heart was filled with bitterness and rebellion. An angel came up to us—your mother; and from that moment there was light in heaven, and the world became beautiful."

Grace extended her hands to Mary Macmillan, and kissed her.

"It is what her mother would have done; it is what her mother did to my little Mary on that day."

"You have prospered," I said.

"Beyond my expectations. I have made money, and more than enough. Miss Felicia—I do not forget, you see—there are men, women, and children living respectable lives who owe their salvation to the lesson I learned that morning in the Park. I say it humbly, not in laudation of myself."

My heart swelled with gratitude; the flowers on the grave were not more bright and beautiful than the deeds inspired by her whose last remains lay within that narrow space.

"I should like to know you and your daughter better," said Grace, very sweetly.

"We shall feel honoured," said Mr. Macmillan, giving her his card. "We do not live in a grand house, but if you visit us, I may be able to show you something that will interest you."

"We will come," said Grace. He did not prolong the interview. We shook hands all round, and Grace and Mary Macmillan kissed each other again, and then we went our several ways.

## CHAPTER XVI.

"WHO SLANDERS HIM, SLANDERS ME."

THE most interesting column in the newspapers now for Grace and me was the column which contained the shipping news. Daily we scanned it, long before it was possible that any news of the "Silver Queen" could be found there. Grace wrote regularly to Ned, and never a day passed that we did not speak about him. So time rolled on, and brought changes in its march. Benjamin Longmore gave up his situation, and devoted himself entirely to his speculations. He was wonderfully lucky; everything he touched turned to gold; and gold, gold, gold was now his chief and only object in life. He did not speak to us of Ned, nor did we to him. With grief did I observe that his one topic of conversation was money. His face grew hard, his eyes were lighted up with greed; the worst qualities of his nature were brought into play. For him there was now no sweetness in home; the dear old days were gone, apparently never to return. The transformation in him was complete and appalling.

Grace saw the change as well as I; but we did not refer to it. In our conversations about Ned we calculated that it would take five months from the day of his departure before a letter could reach us. Three months of these five were gone, and still no news of Ned's ship.

We grew anxious, restless.

"Is it likely," said Grace, "that we could have overlooked the arrival of the ship?"

I ascertained the address of the London agents of the vessel, and we made enquiries there, and came away with sinking hearts. The "Silver Queen," now overdue, had not arrived at its destination, and it was evident that they had fears for its safety. Another week passed, and still no news. Grace went out sometimes by herself, and paid regular visits to the shipping office. On the occasion of one of these visits, Benjamin Longmore had sent for me to assist him in some accounts, and I had, therefore, to forego my wish to accompany her.

The events of this day can never fade from my memory. Placing papers before me, and giving me some necessary instructions, Benjamin Longmore left the room. I was looking down the lists before commencing, when I came to a line that caused the blood to rush into my face and eyes, and for a little while I was blind. My pulses throbbed at fever-heat; I was dazed and overcome.

Rising, I shook myself violently in the effort to recover my senses. The mist before my eyes melted away; I could see once more. Looking down upon the line I read it again. The words and figures were:

"Stolen by Edward Longmore, £200."

"Do you understand the figures, Miss Felicia?" asked Benjamin Longmore, returning to the room.

"I have not commenced yet," I replied. "What is the meaning of this?"

I pointed to the line. He read it slowly:

"Stolen by Edward Longmore, £200. That is quite correct."

"It cannot be, sir," I said.

"It is, I tell you," he said, impatiently. "That is the sum of which Edward Longmore robbed me."

I laid down my pen.

"I can do nothing, sir, till you give me an explanation of this wicked falsehood."

He looked at me sternly, bit his lip, and said:

"Because of your service and position in my family, Miss Felicia, I will give you the explanation you ask for. Edward Longmore left the country very suddenly, and ran away with two hundred pounds of my money, paying for his passage with part of it, and probably squandering the rest. It was only my old associations with his father that prevented me from sending detectives after him to bring him back."

"Edward Longmore," I retorted, "paid for his steerage passage in the 'Silver Queen' with twenty pounds which he was able to save out of his salary."

"How do you know that?"

"The information was conveyed to me in a letter from him."

"But it is not difficult to write a letter," said Benjamin Longmore; "it is not difficult to say that you take a steerage passage when you occupy the saloon. I repeat, this young man robbed me."

"How? In what way?"

"It is very simple. On the morning

of his flight, I had left at the office for him an envelope containing bank-notes for two hundred pounds, which he was to take personally to Guildford, and pay to a firm of lawyers there, and bring back a receipt. There were reasons of my own why I desired that this money should be paid in money instead of by cheque, and personally by an agent of mine instead of being sent through the post. Miss Felicia, the money was never paid; Edward Longmore put it into his pocket and ran away with it. He is a thief."

A cry of horror rang through the room. Turning, we saw Grace, who had entered while we were conversing, and had overheard the frightful accusation. She held a paper in her hand; her face was white; her limbs were trembling.

"Grace, my darling Grace!" I cried, running towards her.

"Do not touch me," she cried, holding her hands against me, "do not speak to me! Let me be a moment—a moment—a moment!"

By a supreme effort she called up all her strength; she controlled the trembling of her body; her voice was firmer when she spoke; but the horror still dwelt in her eyes, and her face was white as falling snow. Stepping close to Benjamin Longmore, she said:

"What words were those you uttered, father?"

From that day she never called him "papa," but used the word "father" instead.

"I am sorry you overheard me, Grace," he replied; "what I said was intended for Miss Felicia's ears alone."

"But Miss Felicia is my friend," said Grace. "I have not a secret hidden from her, and she would not hide this from me. She knows me—she knows my heart. What you said to her about one who cannot defend himself"—her face suddenly dropped into her hands; as suddenly she lifted it again—"must be said to me."

"If it must be, it must," said Benjamin Longmore. "Edward Ollier robbed me of two hundred pounds. He is a thief."

"He was no thief," exclaimed Grace, and her voice rang clear and loud. "He was a gentleman, pure and unstained. As I am a sinless woman, no sin lies at his door. Who slanders him, slanders me! Tell me more. I know you have received letters from his father; have you replied to them? Have you dared to fling this vile accusation into his face as you have

flung it into mine? I will be answered, father."

"You shall be. Yes, I have received letters from Mr. Philip Ollier, and I have replied to them, for the last time. He will never hear from me again. I have told him what I have told you—that his son is a thief."

"How horrible, how horrible," said Grace, "to slander the innocent dead!"

"The dead, my darling Grace!" I cried. "The dead!"

"The 'Silver Queen,'" she said, "the ship my Ned went out in, is lost at sea. Lost, lost at sea! Not a soul is saved!"

The paper fluttered from her hands to the ground. I picked it up quickly, and read the appalling news, contained in a telegram, that the "Silver Queen" had foundered at sea, with all on board.

"May you live to repent!" said Grace to her father. "Oh, my Ned, my noble, innocent Ned! Oh, my heart, my heart!"

She made a wild movement of her hands, and swayed to and fro. Had it not been for the support of my arms she would have fallen; but I held her insensible form close, close to my breast, and bore her slowly from the room.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### GRANDMAMMA LONGMORE'S VANITIES

#### COME TO AN END.

LATER intelligence confirmed the sad news. How eagerly we read the newspapers and searched their columns for one ray of hope! But none was given to us. Every succeeding piece of news strengthened the first rumours until they became a certainty. Floating pieces of timber from the doomed ship were picked up by vessels homeward and outward bound, among them part of the figure-head of the vessel, which seemed to place its fate beyond the possibility of doubt.

Whatever it was in my power to do to comfort Grace's bruised heart, that did I do with all the earnestness of my earnest love. For a long, long time I despaired of my darling's recovery; I feared she would die, for she lay, indeed, for some time between life and death. But the good Lord was merciful, and she was spared to us.

Regularly every day I conveyed to Benjamin Longmore the intelligence of his daughter's state; and I was glad to see that, during that time of agonised uncertainty, his heart seemed to be softened.

But when he knew that Grace was out of danger, the demon that had taken possession of his soul reasserted itself, and he renewed his pursuit after gold with keener zest than before. While his daughter lay near to death, I thought it right to read to him part of the letter which Grace received from Ned on the day he went away.

"You must perceive, sir," I said, "that Ned wrote to you before he left."

"No letter ever reached me," said Benjamin Longmore. "Miss Felicia, I prefer not to say another word upon this subject."

When Grace was strong enough to rise and dress, we both wore mourning for Ned. There was no lack of money. Benjamin Longmore gave freely, and did not demur to the demands I made upon his purse. Grace said to me once :

"Do not neglect my father, Miss Felicia."

I did not. The home went on as usual, only that the light had departed from it. For two or three evenings after Grace came downstairs, her father sat with us; but there was no flow of conversation. We sat very quiet, reading and writing; and it was only when Grace and I retired to bed, that our thoughts found free expression. Very soon Benjamin Longmore absented himself from our society in the evening; but before he did so, Grace said to him :

"Father, you are getting rich, are you not?"

"I am making money," he answered.

"More than you have ever done before?"

"Yes, more than I have ever done; and I shall make more still."

"Will you give me some?"

"How much?"

"If you can spare it, I should like you to give me a pound a week, to spend in whatever way I please."

"You shall have it, Grace. Here is the first quarter."

He gave her two five-pound notes and three sovereigns. I knew well why she asked him for this money; she intended that it should be given away in charity, so that upon some small portion of her father's gains a blessing might rest. And in that way it was disposed of.

When she was quite convalescent, she said to me :

"I am glad I am well again, Miss Felicia; there is work in the world to

do. As my dear mamma's memory is honoured, so shall Ned's be."

Before we received the sad news of the loss of Ned's ship, we had paid a visit to Mr. Macmillan, who, in another part of the East of London than that we had been in the habit of going, was engaged in noble work. He had established workshops in which outcast boys were taught trades, and, when they were of a suitable age, sent abroad to different British colonies. His practical mind rendered him eminently fit to conduct a benevolent enterprise of this nature; and I may be permitted here to record my belief that men who work as he was doing are the true apostles of humanity and civilisation. We asked to be allowed to assist him by our poor efforts, and he gladly enrolled us. Thus my dear Grace found a new sphere of duties, which not alone enlisted her sympathies, but prevented her from brooding, to an injurious degree, over the great sorrow of her life.

The first thing she had done after her illness, when she was able to hold a pen, was to write to Philip Ollier a letter of condolence upon the loss of his dear son. It was a letter which none but a tender-souled and faithful woman could have written, and in the reference she made to her father she gave Philip Ollier clearly to understand that slanderous whispers against the living and the dead found no echo in her heart.

"As long as I live," she said, "I shall mourn dear Ned as the best and noblest man I have known. He is lost to us, but I, as well as you, dear Mr. Ollier, will be faithful to his memory."

She signed herself, "Your loving daughter."

To this letter she received no direct reply, but Philip Ollier wrote to me. His reason for doing so, he said, was that Mr. Longmore had forbidden him to address any further letters to him or his daughter, and that he deemed it wrong to do anything that might effect a breach between father and daughter. Nevertheless he made it quite clear that Grace's letter had brought him inexpressible comfort and balm.

"Grace is like her mother," he said; "I can give her no higher praise."

He sent his dear love to her, and said he would never forget her.

Grace was not deterred from writing to him again because he did not reply direct to her. She told him she approved of his

motive, and that it was her intention to send him a letter every month unless he forbade her. Thus a three-cornered correspondence was kept up between us. From time to time we were cheered by the news he gave us. He had got over his sickness, and was at work again. There were opportunities, he said, of making money, but he had no heart to try.

"Tell him to try, Miss Felicia," she said, "and to send you home a little for our charities."

This now was the one object of her life—to do good to others.

I gave Philip Ollier her message, and from that time he commenced to remit to me a monthly draft which was added to our store. Thus out of the deepest sorrow sprang sweetest flowers.

And so time rolled on until my dear Grace was twenty-one years of age, when she came into possession of her mother's legacy. Benjamin Longmore, to do him justice, was the first to acquaint her that she was now mistress of a capital amounting to over one thousand pounds, in addition to her mother's original legacy.

"You had better leave the money in my hands," he said. "I have been fortunate in my investment of the interest, and I can do even better for you now."

To this Grace would not consent, saying that she desired the whole of the money should be given to her, to dispose of as she pleased. He argued with her, but she was not to be turned from her resolve, and in the end he gave her a cheque for the full amount, saying that she would lose every penny of it.

With this cheque we went to Mr. Macmillan, and after some talk between him and Grace, he consented to invest the money as she desired, and to undertake the conduct of the business details it involved.

I must now say something of Benjamin Longmore's proceedings during these years.

The good fortune which had attended his first speculations clung to him pertinaciously. He still claimed my services from time to time, but he had relieved me of the greater portion of the duties he had imposed upon me, and it was only about once a month that I was closeted with him in the manipulation of figures. I was amazed by what I learned. Money was rolling in upon him, and his investments and speculations became colossal. I saw his name quoted in certain papers, which he kept in his private room, as a million-

aire, and though this was not exactly the truth, there was a fair justification for the statement.

Shortly after he handed Grace her little fortune, he boastfully stated to me that he was worth not less than five hundred thousand pounds.

"What is he going to do with all this money?" I thought. "He cannot take it with him to the grave."

It was at about this time that men began to come to the house, whose only conversation was money. It seemed to be the pulse of their existence, the blood of their life. Money, money, money, nothing but money. The rise and fall of stocks and shares, the launching of new companies, were the only topics. My master gave dinners at his house, and Grace and I, at his desire, took our places at the table; and upon Grace's ears and mine the flow of conversation produced the same effect—amazement and disgust. Some of the guests were enlightened men, others were coarse and vulgar; but success in the making of money rendered them all equal. We could not make ourselves agreeable to these fortune-hunters, and after a while, Benjamin Longmore, perceiving that the association was distasteful to us, gave his grand dinners in grand hotels and clubs, for which we were truly thankful. From that time we saw but little of him at home.

Grandmamma Longmore took great pride in her son's success, and in his honour arrayed herself in new dresses of silk and velvet, which ill became her. But Grandmamma Longmore was failing; her mind began to wander; she babbled about her childhood's reminiscences in a manner that warned us that her end was approaching; and still her new craze for new dresses did not diminish with her failing strength. It shocked us to observe her vanity and the narrowness of her mind; but we paid her every attention, and bore with her weaknesses and shortcomings quietly and patiently. She took to her bed, and could not rise from it; and now she would not be satisfied without silk coverings on her bed and the furniture in her room, and costly hangings to her windows. Her son begrimed her nothing; it was to him she expressed her wishes, and he gratified them with a pride and ostentation which were odious to me. He gave her diamond rings, and she would draw our attention to them, holding up her fingers to the light, and saying:

"See what a great man my son is now ! He will be king of the world."

"King of this world," I thought ; "but how about the next ?"

Early one morning she beckoned to me with her head, not having the strength to speak. She strove hard to do so ; but could not.

"Shall I call your son ?" I asked.

She nodded feebly many times, and I went for Benjamin Longmore. He remained with her an hour and more, and then he came to me hurriedly and bade me send quickly for the doctor ; but when the doctor arrived, all was over—Grandmamma Longmore was dead. So wonderfully thin and small had her face suddenly become, that it looked like a baby's face a hundred years old ; and spread out upon the counterpane were her shrunken, attenuated hands, covered with diamond rings.

#### CHAPTER XVIII.

##### A VOICE FROM THE GRAVE.

THERE have been many memorable days in my life, but not one more memorable than the day following Grandmamma Longmore's funeral.

As Grace and I were sitting together towards the close of the afternoon, within a few minutes of the hour at which Benjamin Longmore generally returned home, we heard the postman's knock at the door, and a servant came in with a number of letters, which she handed to Grace. Benjamin Longmore's correspondence, both in his office and home, was now very heavy ; and Grace took from the tray at least twenty letters, which she placed by her side without looking over them. We were engaged upon some accounts in connection with our charities, and we wished to finish them before Benjamin Longmore came home, so the letters lay in a pile, while we proceeded with our task. No sooner was it completed, than Benjamin Longmore entered the room.

Grace glanced at the letters, and said :

"They are all for you, father."

He took them from her and left us.

"You have dropped a letter, Grace," I said.

She stooped and picked it up, and a wild look flashed into her eyes.

"What is it, Grace ?" I asked, in alarm.

She did not answer, but stood with her eyes fixed upon the letter in her hand.

"Look at it," she whispered. "Merciful Heaven ! Can I be dreaming ?"

I looked at the letter which she held tight, though her hands were trembling. It was addressed to Miss Grace Longmore, and, unless my eyes deceived me, the handwriting was Ned's.

"Be calm, my dear," I said, my heart beating violently ; "it is only a chance resemblance."

"It is not," she cried ; "my Ned, my dear Ned wrote this name ! Oh, is it possible, is it possible ?"

She pressed the letter to her breast, and broke into a flood of tears.

"Shall I open it, dear ?" I said.

"No one but I must open it," she replied, controlling her agitation. "See, see ! It is an Australian letter, and it is in Ned's writing. Give me strength—give me strength !"

I knew the wild hope that was throbbing in her brain ; it was throbbing in my own. Presently she sank to her knees, and, laying her head upon her chair, prayed in silence. I prayed, too, and waited.

She rose, still trembling, but calmer and stronger, and slowly opened the envelope. As her eyes fell upon the first few words, she sobbed :

"Let me feel your arms about me, Miss Felicia ! Tell me I am not dreaming, or I shall go mad !"

I pressed her to my heart ; I whispered soothing assurances to her ; I implored her to summon all her fortitude. My efforts were successful.

"Dear friend," she sobbed, "sweet friend ! What, what should I do without you ?"

With what infinite gratitude did we peruse the letter, which was, indeed, a voice from the grave ! For our dear Ned was living, having been wonderfully spared to tell his own tale, to vindicate his honour, which had been so foully besmeared. It was wonderful—wonderful ! And in this little room, saddened by sad memories, hope and joy reigned once more.

"MY DEAR GRACE," the letter ran, "I can imagine the feelings which will agitate you when you receive this letter, which God, in His mercy, has permitted me to live to write. Not for all the riches in the world would I allow the earliest mail to leave these shores without a letter from me to you. I can scarcely control my impatience ; I shall count the days, the hours, till it reaches your dear hands.

"Grace, dear, our ship was indeed lost, but I and five others were saved. I will

not grieve your tender heart by relating our sufferings. They are over, and one day the great blessing may be mine of seeing you again, and telling you all which the brief time at my disposal (for the mail closes in two hours) will not allow me now to narrate.

"Briefly, dear, the story of our peril and our escape is this :

"We encountered a terrible, a frightful storm, and for three days and nights our ship was tossed and battered about, till masts, bulwarks, decks were torn from it and cast into the wild seas. In that time a great number of passengers and sailors were washed overboard, and those that remained could do nothing but wait for death.

"Early in the storm we lost our boats, but had we not, and had we put to sea in them while the storm was raging, it is not possible they could have lived, crowded as they must have been with despairing mortals. At length came the final moment. The ship went down, and we with it; but rising to the surface my hands clutched a spar which slipped from my grasp. But contact with this spar inspired me with a faint hope. The sea was strewn with broken pieces of the wreck, and I swam to a plank to which a dozen men and women were clinging, and managed to get upon it. I do not know for how long we were beaten about on this frail means of succour; it seemed to us to be weeks, but that could not have been, for we were without food, and could not have lived so long. I think, however, it must have been for sixty or seventy hours, at the end of which time only six of us were left. Then we were cast upon some rocks in the South Pacific, and in a most distressful condition, crawled to land. We were upon an island, and we the only human beings on it.

"During and before the storm the 'Silver Queen' had been driven out of its proper course, and we did not know where we were.

"Grace, dear, we lived upon this island for over three years without seeing a ship. We neglected no means to attract a passing vessel, and we had almost given up hope, when a ship that had also been driven out of its course, saw our signals, and took us on board.

"That is the story, related as briefly as possible, and the one morsel of comfort that animates me now as I write, is that the news of our rescue, doubtless with the names of the few who were saved, has

been cabled to the London newspapers and published in them, so that, long before you can receive this letter, you will have known that I was one of the number. Of my dear father's joy I need not speak, and my joy at seeing him well and strong you may imagine.

"And now, dear Grace, I come to the subject which has caused so much grief, so much injustice.

"My father has shown me all the letters he has received from Miss Felicia, from you, and from your father; and he has described to me what he wrote in his letters to you all. Thus I know exactly what has transpired. For your faith in me, for your dear letters to my father, I thank you, Grace. Heaven will reward you, for kind words and deeds are never lost.

"Dear Grace, it is true that your father left in the office for me a letter containing bank-notes for two hundred pounds, with instructions what to do with the money. But at the very time I was reading this letter, another was delivered to me from my father in Australia, which made me fear that he was dying, and I resolved to go out to him without the delay of an hour. I made enquiries, and was informed that a ship, the 'Silver Queen,' was to sail from Plymouth early the next morning. Had I executed your father's commission, which rendered it necessary that I should go to Guildford, I should have lost the chance of getting to Plymouth in time to obtain a passage in the 'Silver Queen' for Australia. It happened that on this morning your father was absent from the office, and I therefore wrote a letter to him, explaining the circumstances of my sudden departure, and enclosing in it his own written instructions to me, and the bank-notes for the money he wished me to pay away. With my letter in my hand I hastened to your house, intending to give it to you; but you and Miss Felicia were from home, and the only member of the family in the house was your grandmamma. I saw her, and gave her the letter, begging her to give it to Mr. Longmore the moment she saw him. This is a true statement of what occurred.

"Dear Grace, when you have read these lines, go immediately to your grandmamma and tax her memory. Do not be satisfied with a denial from her. Tell her that I, Edward Ollier, unjustly accused of a crime, and unjustly condemned, charge her with concealing that upon which the honour of my good name rests. You will best

know how to force a confession from her. In your dear hands I place my defence. I leave my vindication to you.

"And now I must close this letter; I have barely time to catch the mail. Good-bye, dear Grace. I am as I have ever been; my heart is unchanged. There is nothing to prevent my saying this; nothing that can in justice stop me from declaring that I love you truly and faithfully. Give my love to Miss Felicia, to which my dear father adds his, to her and to you,—Yours till death,

"NED OLLIER."

The letter read, Grace kissed it, and said :

"I am going to my father. You have witnessed the accusation; you must witness the acquittal."

We proceeded to his study, and, busily engaged as he was, he made no remonstrance at the interruption. Ever since he had branded Ned as a thief, there had been, between him and his daughter, none of those outward demonstrations of affection which sweeten the association of parents and children; and, as if by common consent, the smallest matter which might have provoked contention was avoided. I have an impression that, from the day of the accusation, and of his daughter's spirited defence of her lover, Benjamin Longmore was in some sense afraid of Grace, and I have little doubt that this fear sprang from the prickings of his conscience.

He looked up at our entrance, and cleared some papers from a chair for Grace, who was too deeply absorbed in her purpose to seat herself.

"When I gave you your letters, father," she commenced, "I found that one had dropped to the ground, and was left behind."

He stretched forth his hand for it.

"The letter was for me," she said. "Here is the envelope; it comes from Australia, you see. Do you recognise the writing?"

He looked at it, and his face grew a shade paler. I had never been more observant of the smallest signs than I was during this interview; I was seeking for something which, before the interview was ended, was revealed to me.

"It is Ned's writing," said Grace. "He is living, thank Heaven, having been wonderfully and mercifully saved. It would not be proper, perhaps, for me to receive letters from him without your knowledge,

although he has risen, as it were, from the grave, and although there rests upon him no such prohibition as you conveyed to his father."

He exhibited no surprise at her knowledge of this prohibition, nor at the intimation that Ned was living, but I saw that he was disconcerted when she spoke of Ned.

"Has Mr. Ollier written to you," he asked, coldly, "since my last letter to him?"

"He has not," replied Grace, "but I have written to him regularly, and Miss Felicia has heard frequently from him. Father, the news of Ned's safety does not seem to surprise you."

He did not reply to this, and, shuddering as though she had been struck, she continued :

"I have brought Ned's letter for you to read."

"I have no wish to read it," he said.

"But it is imperative you should," said Grace. "He has entrusted his honour to me, and with your own lips you shall acquit him of the foul charge you brought against him."

"Grace," he cried, "do you forget the duty you owe me?"

"No," she said, sadly, "I do not forget it; but there is a higher duty before me, and I shall fulfil it."

She held out the letter to him, and he took it and read it. Returning it to her, he said :

"Well?"

"Well, father? Have you nothing to say to it?"

"Nothing," he replied. "Your grandmother is dead. If what this young man writes is true, he is unfortunate, for his defence comes too late. You cannot summon up the dead."

"It is never too late for justice," said Grace, "and those who have gone from us have still the power to speak to us, to touch our hearts, even to guide us in the right path, if we will but listen. Grandmamma cannot testify to Ned's innocence, but evidence of it may be found in her boxes."

"Well," said Benjamin Longmore, "go and search them."

"Not alone," said Grace; "you must come with us."

"If it must be," he said, shrugging his shoulders; and we three went together upstairs to the room which Grandmamma Longmore had occupied.

Everything had been put in order under

my directions. The grand dresses she had lately worn were in the wardrobe; the valuable rings with which she had decorated her wasted fingers were in a jewel-case on the dressing-table. I pointed them out to Benjamin Longmore, and said he ought to take care of them. The only notice he took of my advice was a careless nod. Absorbed as he was in the pursuit of wealth, there was absent in him that meanness which generally accompanies it.

In a corner of the room were the two hair-covered trunks in which Grandmamma Longmore kept her treasures. We searched for the keys, which Grace gave to her father.

"You must open the trunks," she said.

He unlocked them, and took from them the articles with which they were filled, and laid them on the bed. Many of the parcels were sealed with wax, others were tied with string, all were in some way secured. One by one we opened them, and it was only because of the solemn search in which we were engaged that we were prevented from appreciating the singular comicality of our discoveries. The articles we took from their coverings were absolutely worthless: lumps of sugar—heaven knows how many pounds in all—pins, hairpins, empty reels of cotton and thread, buttons, shoe-laces, patterns of dress-pieces which had been sent to the house by enterprising tradesmen, and other substantial advertisements, such as little cakes of patent soaps, starch, blue, cocoa, tooth-powder, etc., etc. Before we came to the end of this strange collection, Grace handed to her father a flat packet sealed in a dozen places. Unfastening it, he drew forth a letter addressed to himself in Ned's writing. Grace put her hand to her heart.

"Open the letter, father," she said.

He did so, and, like winged messengers from heaven, there fluttered to the bed bank-notes for two hundred pounds. He read the letter in silence, took up the notes, looked carefully at them, and put letter and money in his pocket.

"They are new Bank of England notes, father."

"They are."

"You are a man of business; you must have known the numbers."

"I did not know them, but they could be traced."

"They were never traced?"

"Never."

"You took means that they should be?"

"I did."

"Are you satisfied of Ned's innocence? Do you withdraw the accusation?"

"I am satisfied of his innocence. I withdraw the accusation."

"Ned did not rob you? He is not a thief?"

"He did not rob me. He is not a thief."

"No," said Grace, with a glowing face, "he is not a thief. He is the noblest, purest gentleman in all the world!"

She clasped her hands before her eyes, but there were no tears in them; they were radiant, as was her lovely face. Presently she said :

"There are a few words in Ned's letter, father, which I should like to read aloud." She referred to the letter, and read : "The one morsel of comfort that animates me now, as I write, is that the news of our rescue, doubtless with the names of the few who were saved, has been cabled to the London newspapers and published in them; so that, long before you can receive this letter, you will have known that I was one of the number." Father, for some time after the news of the loss of the 'Silver Queen' was received we searched the newspapers in the hope that intelligence might arrive that it was not true. When at length we gave up hope, we ceased looking at the papers, and from that time have never read them. I will not ask you whether you knew of Ned's safety—I dare not, father."

She paused, dreading, hoping that he would speak, but he uttered no word. I glanced at his face, and saw there that he had read of Ned's rescue, and had kept it from us. What I had been seeking during the interview was now revealed to me.

"Dear Miss Felicia," said Grace, "I am going to my room. No, do not come with me; I do not require support—I am well, I am strong, there is light in my heart. I must offer up to God, alone, my prayer of gratitude!"

It is necessary, perhaps, that I should explain why Mr. Macmillan, with whom we were in constant communication, did not inform us of Ned's rescue. The fact was, although he knew that Grace had passed through a period of sorrow, he knew nothing whatever of its cause. Neither Grace nor I had ever told him that the man she loved was on the "Silver Queen." He had never seen or heard of Philip Ollier or his son, and there was no reason, therefore, why he should speak to us of

one special item in the columns of the newspapers which, in these times, record from day to day so many strange and startling events.

## CHAPTER XIX.

"I HOLD YOU BOTH TO THE PROMISE YOU GAVE ME."

SOME few months after Ned's innocence was established, Grace read me a passage from one of his letters in which he desired her not to write to him again to Australia. He and his father were coming home. He spoke vaguely of a stroke of good fortune which enabled them to return to their native land, but he did not enter into particulars. All he said was, that they were not coming home penniless.

"I shall see my Ned soon," said Grace, in a blithe voice.

For myself, I scarcely knew how to take the news. Both Ned and Grace had given a promise to Benjamin Longmore that they would not marry without his consent, and I felt that this consent would be withheld. In that case, what would the faithful lovers do? Grace was very bright and happy, and I did not speak to her of my forebodings; the dear girl had had sorrow enough.

In due time a letter arrived, in Ned's writing, and with an English stamp on the envelope:

"MY DEAR GRACE,—We are home, my dear father and I. Dare I hope to see you—and how? I must not come to your father's house without his consent. Yours ever faithfully,

"NED."

"I will write to Ned to-night," said Grace, "that you and I will come and see him to-morrow. The address he gives is not far from Mr. Macmillan's house."

On the following day we went to them. Benjamin Longmore placed no restraint upon his daughter's movements, and thereby showed that he had not only respect for her character, but the fullest confidence in her pledged word.

Grace's heart was very full, and we had but little conversation on the road. The moment we turned the corner of the street in which the Olliers lodged, she saw Ned, who was waiting at the door looking out for us. He hastened towards us.

"Grace!" he exclaimed.

"Ned!"

They gazed at each other earnestly, lovingly, their hands clasped tight; that

was all. But the long and earnest look brought happiness to both. Then Philip Ollier, who had kept a little in the background, came forward. He put his arm round Grace, and kissed her, in the open street; and, moreover, both he and Ned kissed me with much affection. There was no harm in it; I was an old woman. Between Grace and Ned no kisses passed.

How brown, and manly, and strong Ned looked! And his father looked well, too. There was no longer trouble in his face, and as his proud eyes rested upon Ned, I knew where his joy and happiness lay.

We walked along to Mr. Macmillan's workshops, Philip Ollier and I leading the way. We had much to talk of, and Philip Ollier spoke of Benjamin Longmore.

"He has grown very rich," he said.

"Very rich," I said.

"He has attained his wish," said Philip Ollier. "He always sighed for riches." He glanced over his shoulder at Grace and Ned, who, engaged in earnest conversation, were following behind. "Is there any hope?"

"I cannot say," I answered. "Mr. Longmore as you knew him once, in the old, happy times, and Mr. Longmore as he is to-day, are different men."

"Ned can provide a comfortable home for Grace, Miss Felicia." I sighed, and he added: "Well, we are not going to despair."

"A fatal promise stands between them, Mr. Ollier."

"Ah, you take the gloomiest view; but there is a bright side to the shield. Come, come, we must have no shadow. The world is filled with light." He spoke so brightly that my sadness vanished. "They are young still. As Grace turned the corner of the street, I thought it was her mother coming towards us."

"She is worthy of her mother, Mr. Ollier. She has the sweetest nature, the most noble heart."

"I know it. I love and honour her."

We arrived at Mr. Macmillan's workshops, and, waiting for Grace and Ned to join us, entered. Mr. Macmillan came and welcomed us. Philip Ollier and Ned were much interested in what he had to say, and when he turned to Grace with the remark, "You cannot imagine how much we owe her," Ned's eyes lighted up with joy. Mr. Macmillan saw how it was with them, and he gazed at them approvingly. A little later Philip Ollier said:

"I think we can help you, Mr. Macmillan. You must enrol us."

"It is done," said Mr. Macmillan. "We are grateful for the smallest assistance."

The hour we passed in the workshops was a very happy one, and I saw Philip Ollier give Mr. Macmillan some money. The father and son walked part of the way home with us, and then we bade them good-bye.

"Ned is going to write to father this week," said Grace.

"Did he speak of the promise that was given to your father?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied; "and we shall abide by it."

Upon our arrival at our house we were told that Mr. Longmore was in his study, and wished to see us at once.

"Ah, here you are," he said; "I have been waiting for you. I am going to show you something very wonderful. You saw the carriage at the door. In five minutes we must be off."

"Where to, father?" asked Grace.

"You shall see; it is a surprise I have in store for you. Run away, and come down in five minutes."

"I have something to tell you first," said Grace. "I have seen Ned and his father."

"Oh," he said, "they have come home, then. They had better have stopped where they were."

"Why, father?"

"Why!" he echoed. "They were in Australia, weren't they, Australia the land of gold? They might have picked up something worth coming across if they had remained. There are golden chances there, as well as in this country, for a man whose head is screwed on right. Look here." He took a newspaper from the table. "When we come home from our drive, read this account of the wonderful reef that is discovered there, and made into a company. It was floated in a day, the capital, one million. Think of it. A million! And the shares are at a fabulous premium; every fifty pounds is worth two hundred. The dividends are declared not yearly or half-yearly, but weekly. It is enough to send a man crazy to read about it. It isn't gold in quartz, it's quartz in gold—a hundred ounces to the ton. Now, if Mr. Ollier and his son had stopped in the land of gold, they might have had just such another piece of luck. The race is to the swift and strong." A singular smile ap-

peared on his lips. "The race. Ah! Mr. Ollier and I, when we were boys"—he pulled himself up suddenly, at this unconscious recalling of the dear old song—"well, yes, we entered for a race. You shall see who will win." He spoke no word of disapproval at our having been to see the Olliers, but, with a light of triumph in his eyes, added, exultingly: "Yes, you shall see who will win. It has come at last—at last!"

"I do not understand you, father," said Grace.

"You will understand soon; but you are wasting time."

"We are quite ready."

"Come along, then."

We left the house, and entered the carriage, and he gave instructions to the coachman, bidding him drive fast. After we had proceeded three or four miles he said:

"Do you remember the road, Miss Felicia?"

"Yes, sir," I replied; "it is the road we took many, many years ago, when your dear wife was alive. Mr. Ollier and his son were with us."

Not a single circumstance in connection with my beloved mistress had escaped my memory. Whenever I visited spots which had been hallowed by her presence, I seemed to live over again the days that were past.

"Yes," said Benjamin Longmore; "they were with us. You remember the story that was told, Miss Felicia?"

"At the gates of the beautiful house, sir, Mon Repos? I remember it well."

"Was I there?" asked Grace.

"No, dear," I said; "you were too young."

"The story was not finished then," observed Benjamin Longmore. "It soon will be."

We dashed along, the horses' hoofs ringing merrily on the hard road. What was my astonishment when the coachman pulled up at the gates of Mon Repos!

"We get out here," said Benjamin Longmore. "Look there."

I looked in the desired direction, and saw bills pasted up announcing the sale of Mon Repos, in consequence of the death of the owner.

"I said one day I should be rich. I am rich. I said one day, 'I shall be master of Mon Repos.' I shall be."

The gates being opened for us, we strolled through the grounds, and after-

wards inspected the house itself. It had been furnished with exquisite taste; there was nothing tawdry about it. Elegant simplicity distinguished every room. It was not as large as I expected it to be, but that rather added to its beauty in my eyes. That nothing had been spared to render it not only beautiful but comfortable was evident. The grounds were as perfect as the dwelling. There was a lovely lawn; there were orchards, nut-walks, kitchen and flower gardens, a dairy—everything, in fact, that the heart could desire.

"It is to be sold by auction in a fortnight," said Benjamin Longmore—"house and furniture in one lot, if the reserve price is bid. I shall buy it, and my dreams will be realised."

We made no comment. Beautiful as was Mon Repos, there were matters much nearer our hearts, even such a simple thing as a letter which Ned was to write to Benjamin Longmore.

By the post which brought this letter to the house Grace received from Ned a copy of it. It was manly and respectful. Ned did not beat about the bush by recounting his sufferings and adventures. He introduced the subject earnestly and tenderly, and, having stated that he was in a position to provide a fitting home for Grace—such a home as he was sure her father would approve of—he concluded by asking to be permitted to pay his addresses to her, with a view to an early marriage.

We read this letter with hope; its tone was so exactly in accordance with our wishes. Anxiously did we wait for some sign from Benjamin Longmore; but day after day passed, and he gave us none. Then Grace resolved to speak to her father.

"You have heard from Ned, father?"

"Ah, you know that he wrote to me?"

"Yes, father. It was arranged between us that he should do so."

"What do you want to ascertain from me?"

"Whether you have replied to Ned's letter."

"I replied to it to-day, declining to give my consent."

Grace turned very white, but the colour soon came to her face again.

"What is your reason, father?"

"I gave none; I will give none. I hold you both to the promise—the sacred promise—you gave me, that you would not marry without my consent."

"It was scarcely a sacred promise, father, but it is binding upon us. You can prevent my marrying Ned, but you cannot prevent my loving him."

"You will think better of that by-and-by."

"Never, father. While I live I shall love him, and no other man. If I marry, I will marry him, and no other man."

"You speak somewhat boldly."

"I speak the dictates of my heart, in which I hold Ned with a love that will never fade—that will never grow less. Father, my happiness is at stake. You will reconsider your decision?"

"I will not. Understand me, Grace. If Mr. Ollier had such a home as Mon Repos to offer you, with means to support it, I might consent to reconsider the matter; not otherwise. Even then I do not say I would consent, but that I would reconsider my answer. Without my sanction you shall marry none but a man as rich as myself."

"It is scarcely likely," said Grace, in a sad tone, "that Ned can offer me such a home, and you have no right to expect it. I should be happy with him anywhere, under any circumstances. You are not acting fairly by us. He is your equal in every way."

"My equal! You are mad!"

"I am truly in earnest. There was a time when you would not have disputed it. Father, think. Money is not everything. It can degrade as well as ennoble."

"Ah!" said Benjamin Longmore, "you speak as those beggars the Olliers speak, and this is their teaching."

"You are mistaken, father. They are my own sentiments, and neither Ned nor his father has said a word on the subject."

"Whichever way it is," said Benjamin Longmore, "I have heard enough. Grace, do not lose sight of your duty to me."

"I will not; but I owe a duty to myself and to others as well as to you."

"I speak of a child's duty to her father. You may force me to command you not to see the Olliers again."

"Do not do that; I should not obey you. Do not drive me too hard, father."

Upon that, my dear Grace left the room.

I was not present at this interview, but I heard all its particulars from Grace, and am therefore enabled to give a faithful account of what took place. Benjamin Longmore did not forbid his daughter to see the Olliers, and we met them every

other day. Ned was very downcast, of course, but Grace's sweet ways comforted him a little.

"We must wait, dear," she said. "My father will relent in time; I feel that he will."

But our principal comforter was Philip Ollier. He insisted that all would come right, and his cheerfulness and confidence put heart into us. I gave him an account of our visit to Mon Repos, and he smiled and said :

"See how riches may turn one's head, Miss Felicia. A dozen years ago nothing could have shaken my faith in Benjamin Longmore. The glare of gold has been too much for him. Well, time will show, time will show."

#### CHAPTER XX.

##### A FORTNIGHT OF EXCITEMENT.

THE fortnight between the day of our visit to Mon Repos, and that on which it was to be sold by auction, was an unusually busy time with Benjamin Longmore, both at home and in his City offices. During all these heart-troubles his conduct towards me had been wonderfully consistent. He knew that I took sides with Grace against him, and that I aided and abetted her in doing that of which he disapproved, such as visiting the Olliers and meeting Ned regularly. He knew that whenever these domestic matters cropped up I expressed my opinions frankly and freely, and that they were always adverse to his own. And yet, although he was my master, he never hinted at dismissing me from his service. He paid the most scrupulous regard to his wife's last wishes as to my position with Grace and in his house; and antagonistic as we were, and much as I disapproved of his proceedings, I could not but yield him respect for this faithful obedience to one who, if she had lived, would have been a shield against evil, and would have kept him from back-sliding.

The painful crisis to which matters had come did not prevent him from calling upon my services during the fortnight, the pregnant events of which I am now recording. He summoned me, indeed, every day, and kept me busy in his private office with figures and calculations and comparisons, and as he had a great many callers while I was with him, I was a wit-

ness of much that opened my eyes to what was going on.

In the course of this fortnight he had an extraordinary number of visitors, who all came upon business, and who were all in a tremendous hurry. Day by day the excitement grew until my head was in a perfect whirl, and it was only the stirring nature of the disclosures which were made in my presence that enabled me to keep my senses together, for I saw that something serious was impending.

On the first day, Benjamin Longmore said to me, in explanation of his intention to remain at home a while longer than usual during business hours :

"I intend in the next fortnight, Miss Felicia, to make enough money to pay for Mon Repos out and out. I have had a private hint that the reserve put upon the whole of the property as it stands is eighty thousand pounds. It is a large sum, but much of the furniture is very valuable, and you will see by this catalogue, which you can look over at your leisure, that the house is filled with rare china and bric-a-brac, and that there are a number of famous pictures in it. Now, I shall make this eighty thousand pounds before the sale takes place, perhaps more; and to do this by a grand coup of my devising, it is necessary that I should be seen very little on the Exchange. But my agents are working for me."

I do not pretend to be able to make this grand coup clear to those who are reading my story, first because it was very complicated, and second because it presently became mixed up with other grand coups, which rendered it still more confusing to me. I could work out the figures and calculations which Benjamin Longmore set before me, and that was all that was required of me.

At the end of the first day, after he had dismissed his agents, Benjamin Longmore rubbed his hands gleefully, and informed me that a grand commencement had been made.

"If I realised what I have done today," he said, "I should add ten thousand pounds to my banking account."

It was a marvel to me how great sums of money could be so easily made without any of it passing from hand to hand.

Fortunately my master did not summon me to his room till two o'clock of the day, so that our mornings were free, and it was in the morning that Grace and I were in the habit of seeing Ned and his father.

On the sixth or seventh day, something that one of his agents said to Benjamin Longmore sent him into a fit of laughter.

"There is nothing to look glum about," he said. "The stock has gone down all of a sudden. Let me see. It is two and a half worse than it opened at this morning. Well, buy, up to a quarter of a million. Run off at once."

The agents' cabs, with the smartest horses that could be selected, were always waiting at the door, and during those exciting days used to dash up and tear away like mad.

"If it continues to go down," said the agent, "what then?"

"What then?" exclaimed Benjamin Longmore. "Why, continue to buy. How do you think I have made my money—by being chicken-hearted?"

Away flew the agent to carry out my master's instructions, and came back in the evening with a graver face. He reported that the stock still continued to go down, and that there was a loss of twelve thousand pounds on the day's transaction.

"We shall realise all the more," said Benjamin Longmore, "when it goes up again—as it must. When was I mistaken? To-morrow morning, the first thing, continue to buy all that is offered. We will keep it in one hand."

On the morrow, after Benjamin Longmore's return home, the telegraph boys kept up one continued rat-tat, rat-tat, with their messages, and what with these and his numerous callers, he had enough to do. But he did everything promptly, giving his orders with decision, and I understood how it was that he had hitherto been so successful. I remembered him saying once, a good many years ago, that he had the mastiff quality in him; he was now displaying it.

On this evening he branched out speculating in other directions; but the markets continued to go against him. When he sold stock it went up, when he bought it went down, and, as his operations were colossal, the balance on the wrong side swelled enormously. I heard him walking up and down his bedroom in the night, and upon my seeing him the following day I was shocked at his wild and haggard face. If I had had the slightest hope that my advice would have been of assistance, I should have advised him to stop; but I knew too well that he would have resented the smallest interference from me.

Every night now he paced the bedroom,

or crept down to his private office to pore over figures, instead of going to sleep; but I doubt whether sleep would have come to him if he had courted it, he was in that state of excitement.

"To-morrow the estate will be sold," he said. "I intend to purchase it—to become master of Mon Repos before I die."

"You should try to sleep, sir," I said.

"Sleep!" he muttered. "I don't think I shall ever sleep again. And if Mon Repos slips through my fingers—"

Nevertheless, racked and tortured as he was, he gave to his agents that evening instructions that staggered them.

"What are you staring and mumbling at?" he exclaimed. "I know what I am about. Carry out my instructions to the letter. It is in this way men become millionaires. I shall get back every shilling of my losses three times over. If I forget to tell you in the morning, I shall be at the Mart from twelve o'clock to one. I am going to buy Mon Repos."

The agent stared at him, and hurried off.

Benjamin Longmore's cheque-book had been in frequent requisition these last few days, and he had signed for sums of enormous amount. He walked up and down the room, clutching his hair, twining and untwining his fingers, and muttering to himself. Grace knew of the condition of her father, and had sent a private note to the doctor, asking him to call at the house in a friendly way to see Benjamin Longmore, and to say nothing of her having written to him. The doctor dropped in, and shook hands with my master with assumed carelessness, and then, as if it had suddenly occurred to him, said:

"It strikes me, Mr. Longmore, that you look worn."

"I dare say," said Benjamin Longmore. "I have a great deal on my mind. I am going to buy a fine estate to-morrow, and it will cost a great deal of money, a great deal of money, a great deal of money. But I mean to buy it, I mean to buy it."

"Of course, of course. Now, I am going to take the liberty of an old friend—not of a doctor, you know—and I shall send you a sedative."

"You may send it if you like," said Benjamin Longmore, "but I promise you it will not be taken. I see how it is; you are in league against me."

"Nonsense, nonsense!"

"You are. You will give me a sedative that will send me to sleep till Mon Repos

is sold. You are kind, doctor, but the trick has failed. Don't trouble yourself, my friend."

He glared at the doctor, who laughed and shrugged his shoulders, and after a little further conversation bade my master good night.

I succeeded in getting a few words with him before he left the house.

"Mr. Longmore is in a bad way," he said. "If this continues he will have brain fever. By the way, some rumours have reached me that he is pretty nigh ruined."

He did not ask me if the rumours were true, but I told him that Benjamin Longmore was greatly worried by some speculations which had not turned out well. He nodded his head, and said :

"I shall risk offending him, and shall call in the morning to see him."

He was as good as his word, and he made his appearance while we were breakfasting. I say "breakfasting," but neither Grace nor I ate much; Benjamin Longmore ate nothing. He had passed a dreadful night, and had not taken off his clothes. Before the doctor called, he said :

"I am not going to my office this morning, Miss Felicia. I shall go straight from here to the Mart. Send off these telegrams immediately."

They were to his agents, and contained fresh instructions. His reception of the doctor was not friendly.

"You have eaten no breakfast, I see," said the doctor. "That is a bad commencement of the day."

"I can't eat," muttered Benjamin Longmore. "Food chokes me."

"Take a glass of champagne," said the doctor. "That, at least, is a medicine you will not object to."

Benjamin Longmore consented readily enough to this, and he drank two glasses of champagne, watching warily that the doctor dropped nothing into the glass.

"And now," said the doctor, "let me advise you strongly to allow Miss Felicia to accompany you when you go out this morning."

"I will think of it," said my master.

At eleven o'clock he told me that I might go with him if I liked, saying that it would please me, perhaps, to see him purchase the estate upon which he had set his heart. I was soon ready, and we rode together to the City.

In the Mart, in which the auction was to take place, messengers were awaiting him

with written slips of paper. As he glanced at them his face turned deathly white, and he trembled like a man struck with palsy. Writing answers to the information he had received, he despatched the messengers, and we applied ourselves to what the auctioneer, who was already in his box, was saying. There were other properties to be sold before *Mon Repos*, and this part of the day's business being disposed of, the auctioneer said :

"I have now to offer, gentlemen, the most charming and lovely estate in the suburbs of London."

He went on to describe it, and said that, in accordance with the will of the late owner, *Mon Repos*, a freehold of twenty acres, situated in a locality in which the value of land was daily rising, with all its improvements and furnishings, of which complete details were given in the catalogues, was to be put up in a single lot. If the reserve price was reached, it would be sold; if not, it would be disposed of piecemeal on a future day. He then asked for a bid for the property.

I looked at Benjamin Longmore, who, in a husky voice, called out :

"Fifty thousand."

"Fifty thousand is bid," said the auctioneer. "Fifty thousand—fifty thousand. Fifty-two thousand, fifty-four, fifty-six, fifty-eight, sixty thousand. I may state that this is a long way from the reserve. Sixty-five thousand. Thank you."

"Seventy thousand," said Benjamin Longmore.

"Seventy thousand, seventy-five thousand, seventy-six, seventy-seven, seventy-eight, seventy-eight, seventy-eight. We have not reached the mark yet, gentlemen."

"Eighty thousand," said Benjamin Longmore.

"Eighty thousand, eighty thousand, eighty thousand. Eighty-one thousand. Thank you."

At the moment the auctioneer was dwelling on this last bid, and Benjamin Longmore was about to open his lips to bid again, he was touched on the shoulder. Turning, he saw an agent who had visited the house of late very frequently. He whispered something in Benjamin Longmore's ear.

"My God!" muttered my master, and his hands wandered in front of him for support.

"Eighty-one thousand, eighty-one thousand, eighty-one thousand," said the auctioneer. "If there is no further bid,

this magnificent property will be knocked down for eighty-one thousand pounds. Eighty-one, eighty-one. Going—going."

Benjamin Longmore essayed to speak, but no sound issued from his lips. The agent clutched my master's arm, and shook his head warningly. Again my master tried to speak, but could not. The muscles of his face twitched convulsively, and I saw that he was in frightful agony.

"It is going, gentlemen," said the auctioneer. "It will be years before such another opportunity presents itself; it is the chance of a lifetime. Going for eighty-one thousand pounds. Going—going—going—gone!"

The hammer dropped. Mon Repos was sold, and Benjamin Longmore was not its master.

With a muffled cry he staggered and fell to the ground.

#### CHAPTER XXI.

##### AND ALL THE BIRDS WERE SINGING.

A MONTH after Mon Repos was sold, the doctor, Grace, and I were standing in the sitting-room of our house.

"He will pull through," said the doctor. "I could not conscientiously give you so decided a hope before this morning, but the tide has turned, and your father will now pull through. It has been a hard tussle, and but for you, my dear ladies, he would have lost the battle. Mr. Longmore owes his life to your care and attention. That is good news, is it not? He will soon be quite well. And you, my dear"—he touched Grace's cheek lightly with his finger—"must get your roses back again. Miss Felicia, there is a young gentleman walking up and down the opposite side of the road. I have observed him indulging in that amusement on other occasions, and the strange feature of the affair is that he keeps continually looking at the windows of this house." The good doctor smiled as he made this comment. "Come to the window. There is the culprit."

It was Ned, who, when he saw us at the window, nodded, and smiled anxiously.

"Bless me!" said the doctor; "the roses are coming back much quicker than I could have anticipated. Well, good morning, good morning."

We went with him to the street-door, and Ned came over to us.

"Is it good news, dear Grace?" he said.

"It is good news, dear Ned," said

Grace. "My father is out of danger, I thank Heaven."

They stood at the door talking for a few minutes, and then Ned took his departure.

Benjamin Longmore, since the sale of Mon Repos, had indeed been near to death, and I verily believe, if it had not been for Grace's unremitting care, that he would have died. Another misfortune had befallen him—he was utterly ruined. Of his great fortune not a shilling was saved. The mad speculation of that fatal fortnight had stripped him bare.

There was even something more. Had it not been for the intervention of an unknown friend, dishonour would have attended his ruin, for in the settlement of his accounts a large sum was needed to set them straight. Unknown to him, unknown to us, this friend had stepped in to preserve his good name, and although he stood a beggar in the eyes of the world, not a word could be uttered against him. He had grown very old-looking during his illness, and his hair was almost white.

As the doctor predicted, he soon got well. From the day on which he was pronounced out of danger he mended rapidly; and now, after the lapse of another two weeks, he was sitting with us, listening to Grace's gentle voice, and gazing at her in a kind of wonder. Ever and anon he turned his thoughts inwards, as it were, questioning himself.

"Grace, dear," he said.

"Yes, father?"

"Come close to me, child. Can you forgive me?"

She kissed his tears away.

"It is over, dear father. We will forget the past few years. We will look forward to the future, with hope, with love." She repeated the words, "With hope, with love."

And now it was she who was crying. He held her in his embrace, and presently released her, and she went back to her place, and took up the work upon which she was engaged.

Calling to me he said that he wished me to write to a gentleman who had managed his business for him, asking him to call in the morning. I wrote the letter at his dictation, and he signed it; and on the following morning his late manager called.

"Do not go away, Miss Felicia," said Benjamin Longmore.

I resumed my seat, and the two gentlemen had a long conversation, in the course of which my master learned all that had taken place.

"I am a ruined man, Miss Felicia," he said.

"We knew that, sir," I said; "but it made no difference."

Had I expressed myself truly, I should have said I was glad of it. The money he had amassed had brought sorrow with it; and now that he had lost it, there was a chance of happiness for us.

"Who has paid the expenses of the house during my illness, Miss Felicia?" he asked.

"Grace, sir. She has a little money of her own, you know."

"I am glad she took it from me," he said, "or it might have been lost in the wreck."

He then went into closer details with his late manager, and learned that his accounts had been over twenty thousand pounds short.

"The amount was paid by a gentleman," said the manager, "who desired that his name should not be introduced into the matter; but it is right you should know it."

"It is. Who was this good friend?"

"Mr. Philip Ollier."

I started, and looked up. Ned had not mentioned one word of this.

"I am justly reproved," said Benjamin Longmore; and when the gentleman was gone, he asked me to bring Grace to him.

"Philip Ollier has saved my good name, Grace," he said.

"It is like him," she replied. "It was my good name, as well as yours."

"Has he been here, Grace?"

"No, father. Ned has been outside, anxious for news; that is all. He did not come in. I have a note for you from Mr. Ollier. May I give it to you?"

"I shall be glad to have it, Grace."

She handed it to him. It was short and simple:

"DEAR BEN,—May Ned and I come to see you? Your old and faithful friend,

"PHILIP OLLIER."

Benjamin Longmore was silent for a few moments. Then he said:

"Bring me pen and ink, dear."

She put writing materials before him, and he wrote:

"DEAR PHIL,—If your heart is not filled with bitterness towards me, come, and bring Ned with you. I am awakened out of a horrible dream. I hardly dare to call myself your old friend,

"BENJAMIN LONGMORE."

He gave the letter to Grace to read. Her eyes became bright; there was a joyful ring in her voice.

"I will send it at once, father."

"Take it to him," said Benjamin Longmore, "and bring him and Ned back with you, if they will come. Miss Felicia will remain with me."

She danced out of the room, and danced back again, dressed for a happy walk, almost before we could turn round. She embraced her father and me, and flew out of the house like a bird in sweet spring-time.

When she returned with Philip Ollier and Ned, Benjamin Longmore looked humbly and imploringly at them.

"Not a word, old friend," said Philip Ollier, taking his hand, and patting him on the shoulder. "We all make mistakes sometimes. Let us be thankful if we are spared to repair them."

Benjamin Longmore called Grace and Ned to him, and joined their hands.

"But she is a poor girl, Ned," he said.

"She is Grace," said Ned, kissing her.

During the evening Benjamin Longmore asked Philip Ollier how he had made his money.

"You have heard of the Eureka mine, Ben?" said Philip Ollier.

It was the wonderful mine of which Benjamin Longmore had spoken to me when he said it was a pity the Olliers had not remained in Australia.

"Who has not heard of it?" said Benjamin Longmore. "It is one of the richest gold-mines in the world."

"Ned and I discovered that mine," said Philip Ollier, quietly. "We are the largest shareholders."

On a bright morning Philip Ollier and Ned came in a carriage to take us for a drive. We travelled the old road, Barnet way, and the carriage stopped at the gates of Mon Repos.

"Our boyish dream, Ben," said Philip Ollier, with a smile.

"Yes, Phil," said Benjamin Longmore, with a touch of sadness in his voice.

Philip Ollier jumped down and rang the bell. The gates were opened, and, wrapt in wonder, we walked into the lovely grounds.

"Dear Grace," said Philip Ollier, "sweet Grace, for the blessing of whose love my boy Ned and I are eternally grateful, this is my wedding present to you. I bought Mon Repos. My dear, it is yours."

The fragrant air whispered to the trees, and all the birds were singing.

